

Left-Behind Children in Rural China: Research Based on the Use of Qualitative Methods in Inner Mongolia

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Abstract

There is a dearth of knowledge about the experiences of primary school aged left-behind children in the family, school and the community. The term “left-behind children” has occurred in a variety of literature in China since the end of 1980s when the huge population flows from rural areas to urban areas began. A review of the existing research literature suggests that emergence of left-behind children in China is the result of some unique features of rural migration to the cities in China. Their parents’ migration has a significant impact on their welfare and wellbeing in every respect.

The overall aim of this research is to explore the experiences of children’s being left behind at home, at school and in the community from the perspectives of four main groups of stakeholders: left-behind children, their guardians, their parents and their teachers. This thesis challenges the view of left-behind children as an event, but instead argues that it is a dynamic process of choice and change with a variety of outcomes.

As this is only a small scale survey with the intention of exploring whether the more detailed case studies are typical of the experiences of a wider group of children, in-depth interviews were undertaken with twelve left-behind children and one not-left-behind child in three different stages.

The research suggests that negative effects of their parents’ migration can also be seen to be cumulative and to create a negative ‘trajectory’ through which momentum for change developed, developments which seemed impossible to resist. However, both left-behind children and their parents are not always passive victims of the adverse outcomes. A number of parents make complex assessments of the child’s well-being and negotiate with carers and potential carers.

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Chapter 1 Background to the Emergence of Left-Behind Children

Introduction

This chapter details the background in which my research is located in order to facilitate an understanding of how the research aims developed and the reasons for the focus on the experiences of left-behind children in China. The chapter looks at two issues: the emergence of left-behind children as a social issue; and evidence of the impacts of migration on left-behind children.

Left-behind children refers to children or young people (under 18 years) who are left alone or live with their rural relatives or neighbours, because their parents have left the home to work in urban areas. According to the Fifth National Census, in 2000, there were nearly 23 million (22,904,005) left-behind children in China, accounting for 8.05% of the total population of children (Duan & Zhou, 2005; Gu, 2006). They were distributed mainly over Sichuan, Jiangxi, Anhui and Hunan provinces, with 14.9% of them in Sichuan Province alone. Since 2000, with increasing numbers of rural transient populations, the population of left-behind children has also been rising (Dang, 2006). In addition to this, a great number of developing countries will almost certainly be confronted with similar social issues, as they too move towards industrialisation and urbanisation.

Background to the Emergence of Left-Behind Children

A wealth of research equates the emergence of left-behind children with the background of migration. Li, J. T. (2003) attributes the emergence of left-behind children to the migration of labour, in particular surplus rural labour moving to urban areas. However, this analysis is unable to illuminate why young parents leave their children in their hometown rather than taking them with them.

Wu and Ding (2004) considers that the organisation of Chinese society into a strictly dual social structure (urban-rural) system makes it extremely difficult for migrants coming from rural areas to take their children with them, because rural children do not enjoy the same rights as urban children in terms of educational entitlements and provision. Children who study in the underprivileged schools for migrant children, with poor facilities and low-qualified teachers, might end up failing in the competition for places in the urban high schools. Thus, their parents leave them to attend schools in their hometown. To a great part, this forms the background to the emergence of left-behind children.

A study on the left-behind children in Motian village Xiushui County in Jiang Xi Province (Duan, 2005) finds that the emergence of left-behind children is due to the following reasons: their parents could not afford the high school tuition fees in the areas to which they had migrated; and, they needed to spend much more on school fees in the city than in their rural hometown. The study also mentions other complicating factors such as: the parents working under high pressure; being unable to arrange for child care; the children being unsettled living away from their home town; and, the unsettled nature of the parent's jobs. All these factors contributed, making it impossible for them to go to school in the city.

Lv (2007) concludes that the majority of those involved in migration employ expressions, such as “could not afford it”, which relate to income and economic status to explain why they leave their children behind. In addition, the instability of the work they do and the long hours they work make it impossible for them to look after their children. Furthermore, their children were not able to attend the advantaged schools in the city, so they have to send them back home to study. In this case, the dynamics of the left-behind was embodied as: left behind in their home village-living with parents in the host cities-sent back to their home village.

To have a comprehensive understanding of the reasons why children are left behind by their migrant parents, it is necessary to look at migration in China in more detail.

Definitions

The term “left-behind children” has occurred in a variety of literature in China since the 1980s. However, from the beginning, the studies on this special group did not adopt a universally accepted definition, nor is there general agreement amongst researchers in China. According to Ye and Murray (2005, p.18) left-behind children refers to “those children whose father and/or mother have migrated for work and are taken care of by father or mother, someone from the older generation, and/or others” . Under this definition, “children” refer to those who are under 18 years old. In other studies on the psychological health of left-behind children (such as Jia et al., 2010; Shen et al., 2011; Su, 2004), left-behind children refers to children below 16 years of age whose parents (or a single parent) have migrated and who remain looked after by other relatives. In Lin’s study, left-behind children refer to those children below

the age of 14 years of age who are separated from either both their parents or one parent due to their parents' migration (Lin, 2003). In other scholars' opinion, left-behind children are those children whose parents have migrated and are cared for by someone from the older generation or others (Cheng, 2007; Fan et al., 2010). However, it seems that there is no clear agreement on age in a great number of studies (Guo, 2005; Lin & Yuan, 2007; Lv, 2007; Mei, 2006).

From the different definitions given above, it could be concluded that making the following factors clear is essential to defining "left-behind children":

- 1) Who has migrated? Mother, father or both?
- 2) How long have the children been left? More than one year, half a year, three months or other criteria?
- 3) What age are the children? Up to what age can they be considered as children?

Any variation in these three factors might lead to differences in the research design and the later results of such enquiries. These discrepancies will be referred to later in this chapter and subsequent chapters. In this research, left-behind children refers to the children below 16 years of age who are separated from both of their parents for at least half a year because of their parents' migration to work. Due to the longitudinal perspective adopted in this study, not-left-behind children (living with both parents and at least one parent) might also be involved in the entire research process.

Recent Migration in China

The emergence of left-behind children is rooted in the separation caused by the parents' migration. Massive social mobility is the context in which the problem of left-behind children has arisen; and social migration in China since

the end of the 1980s has unique features that make the problems of left-behind children more acute.

China has witnessed huge population flows in the last two centuries. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the registered population in China's rural areas totals more than 900 million, but the permanent residents there number more than 740 million. This means that nearly 200 million of the registered rural population are not resident in the rural areas but live elsewhere (Dang, 2006). A significant amount of the population flow is due to farmers who have moved to the cities, especially those in the developed eastern regions. There are about 3 million migrant agricultural workers (*nong min gong*) working in Beijing and more than 3 million in Shanghai. In Shenzhen, an economically developed city in the south, the migrant population is 5 million, and most of these used to work in agriculture (Dang, 2006). There are many factors behind the flow of rural population to the city, but in essence it is economic interests that move agricultural workers to the cities (Dang, 2006; Li, Q., 2003).

According to statistics, the average income across the whole of China in 2004 was 16,683 Yuan in the city and 7337 Yuan in rural areas (Gao, 2008). There is also a big gap between average level of consumption in urban and rural areas. Before economic reform, the average level of consumption in urban areas was 2.9 times more than that in rural areas. With the deepening of market reform in cities, the gap between average levels of consumption in urban areas and rural areas widened to 3.6 times (Li, Q., 2003).

Li, Q. (2003) uses a model based on Push and Pull Theory to examine which factors determine the migration of rural workers. He finds that "average income in rural areas is too low" was ranked first in 2000 by the agricultural workers and "average income in urban area is relatively high" was ranked first in 2002. He argues that both of the factors centre on the low economic income that

drives agricultural workers into the cities. His 2002 study suggests that migrant workers' income increased by 8738.3 Yuan, after moving to urban areas. He suggests that 90.1% of migrant workers earn much more money after they go to work in the city, and the tremendous economic gap drives more and more agricultural workers into cities.

In addition, there are big differences between urban and rural areas in infrastructure, facilities and public services. Booming commerce and colourful cultural and entertainment activities in big cities are also a big attraction for young people (Dang, 2006; Chan et al., 2008).

Chinese school-age children spend six years in primary school and then three years in junior high school. Some of the junior high graduates enter vocational schools to prepare for employment and some enrol in senior high school for three years before taking college entrance examinations. Compared with their urban counterparts, primary and junior high schools in rural areas are usually poorly built, equipped and staffed. Because of this, better-off parents would rather send their children to schools in the nearby town, and more intelligent students would also choose better schools. All these factors have a negative impact on the teachers and students who remain in the rural areas, and make it more difficult for students to stay in rural schools (Dang, 2006).

The medical and health care systems in rural areas are also vastly inferior to those in urban areas. Hospitals in towns and cities usually have more competent doctors, and rural workers would prefer to go to such hospitals or even those in larger cities for disorders they think are serious, leaving rural health centres with few patients. Furthermore, a lower income for rural doctors also leads to problems in retaining the best ones.

Towns in China's rural areas usually have banks, post offices, bus stations, and

some shops and open-air markets, where agricultural workers can buy daily groceries and farming supplies. Some towns also have a cinema and a library, but normally their services cannot compare to their counterparts in cities. Due to emigration, the populations of some rural towns are declining, which means fewer customers for services. As a result, some of the institutions have been closed down. Most noticeable is that some commercial banks no longer keep banks in rural towns, and farmers have to visit banks in the nearby town when they need to access banking facilities. As a result, the decrease in the number of public services and commercial institutions, which comes as a response to emigration, also accelerates the flow of rural populations to cities (Chan et al., 2008; Dang, 2006; Gao, 2008).

Migrants in Cities

With large numbers of agricultural workers rushing into the cities, the economic life of cities has also changed. Migrant workers from rural areas have learned to accept lower pay, poorer working conditions and more physically demanding jobs. They account for the majority of labourers on construction sites, sanitary workers, domestic servants and restaurant waiters (Dang, 2006; Gao, 2008; Li & Li, 2007; Lu, 2008; Lv, 2007; Xiang, 2005; Wang, 2001).

As numerous rural workers wish to work in cities, an ample labour supply has resulted in very slow wage increases over a long period of time. Between 1993 and 2003, the average wage of migrant workers remained virtually unchanged, with the minimum wage in the catering industry at about 400 Yuan a month. After 2003, as the Chinese government enhanced its support for agriculture, many farmers chose to stay in the countryside thanks to increased income from farming. This affected the supply and demand in the urban labour market

and the wages of migrant workers began to rise. Another important factor behind the wage increase was increasingly stringent government regulation which made it more difficult for employers to pay low wages, insist on overtime or hire cheap child labour. In 2005 migrant workers in many cities in the eastern region saw their wages rise by 10% and some businesses had to offer a 30% wage increase to attract workers to some posts (Dang, 2006).

However, the gap between urban workers (registered as permanent urban residents) and agricultural workers (working in cities but registered as rural residents) is evidently deep (Gao, 2008; Li & Li, 2007). Li and Li (2007) find that the average income of an agricultural worker was 921 Yuan per month and that this only accounted for 68.4% of their urban counterpart's average income, which was 1,346 Yuan per month. Eighty percent of migrant workers' monthly income was below 1,000 Yuan and 27% of the total participants earned less than 500 Yuan per month.

The huge gap between rural and urban workers in terms of social protection is based on the feature of the present Chinese social security system. There are two fundamentally different welfare systems for Chinese citizens: one for cities and one for rural areas. This is rooted in the Household Registration System (also known as the Hukou system).

In the 1950s China gradually instituted a Household Registered (*hukou*) System (HRS), which classifies the whole population into two categories; urban residents (*jumin*) and rural residents (*nongmin*). Under such a system, farmers faced restrictions in getting a job, public service entitlements or a residence in a city; with the Registration giving the government power to control people's geographical mobility (Chan et al., 2008; Dang, 2006; Xiang, 2005). Before the economic reforms, "the HRS became a welfare entitlement that defined the distribution of most daily necessities such as staple foods, as

well as the arrangement of jobs” (Chan et al., 2008, p8). Urban economic departments absorbed the rural labour force only strictly following state plans, and rural people mostly worked in the agricultural sector, with a small number working in rural enterprises and services, which were started by farmers (Chan et al., 2008; Dang, 2006; Xiang, 2005).

Since the 1980s, the state has gradually loosened its restrictions on farmers in employment, under the tremendous pressures brought by the economic reforms, thus making it easier for rural workers to live and work in cities. “People living in rural areas were also attracted to urban areas because of limited job opportunities in the agriculture sector as well as a better income in industrial areas” (Chan et al., 2008, p8). But the restrictions on employment and residence for rural workers have not been completely removed, and about 100 million rural migrants are working in cities in the capacity of rural residents who are not able to enjoy the same rights as their urban counterparts. Most migrant workers are engaged in low-paid, dirty, highly physically demanding or dangerous jobs and are not entitled to accessing basic public services. The dual rural-urban division also contributes to the distribution of welfare provision among Chinese citizens, as can be seen in this and following chapters.

Migrant workers’ income is much lower than urban workers whereas their working hours are much longer than their urban counterparts (Gao, 2006; Li & Li, 2007; Lv, 2007). Li and Li indicate that in spite of the 8-hour system of labour, migrant workers work 56.6 hours per week. This is 8 hours more than urban workers who work an average of 47.9 hours per week. They also estimate that about 34% of migrant workers work more than 60 hours per week.

Without the status of full urban citizenship, migrant workers often have to work in the informal sector without secure jobs. They also move to different cities each year to search for jobs. As Xiang comments, “Spontaneous migrants thus

become a special social category, the “floating population”, both physically and institutionally. Without basic economic security, migrants have to be particularly cautious about bringing family members with them.”(Xiang, 2005, p.6)

Furthermore, only 16.3% of migrant workers have pensions, compared with 67.3% of urban workers; and only 6.2% of migrant workers have unemployment insurance, compared with 44.5% of workers with urban household residency. Only 28.4% of workers with rural household residency are entitled to claim a refund for part or all of their medical expenses, whereas 66.3% of their urban counterparts can apply for re-imbursment of their medical costs (Li & Li, 2007).

With low wages and no public housing rights, migrant workers have no choice but to live in poor housing with limited basic facilities. Indeed, a large number of migrant workers live in “work sheds” (Zhang, 2009). Many married couples rent a room, usually in the suburbs, with only very basic sanitation. Some of the houses rented by migrant workers are illegal structures, which face demolition in city planning. They remain standing only because their demolition would create a housing problem for migrant workers. Although most cities in China are trying to prevent slums from developing, in some cities migrant workers have gathered in quarters with poor sanitation and lack of law enforcement. This issue cannot be resolved within a short period of time (Chan et al., 2008; Dang, 2006; Zhang, 2009).

According to Li and Wang (2006), in 2004 the average per capita living space of migrant workers was 3.72 m² compared with 17.63 m² for urban residents in Jingbo City. Most of the migrant workers were living in shared accommodation, quarters for single people and “work sheds” . Wu (2002) found that the per capita living space of migrant workers in Shanghai was 9 m² and in Beijing 7.5

m², compared with the local residents, who had 18.7 m² and 18.4 m² respectively in the two cities.

There are clear housing differences between local residents and migrant workers, not only in the amount of living space, but also in living conditions.

Lack of basic facilities

Wang (2004) reports on a study in Shenyang and Chongqing on the living conditions of migrant workers. “Only 4% had their own shower and bath; the majority needed to share a toilet with other families; 28% did not have a kitchen, and 8% were even without a water tap. Their housing conditions were very poor but 80% of them spent more than 10% of their income on housing. This contrasts with 80% of local residents who paid less than 5% of their income in housing costs” (Wang, 2004 as cited in Chan et al., 2008, p184). There was no bed in some migrant workers’ rooms. They had to sleep on the floor (Zhang, 2009). Wu (2002) indicates that some families of three even shared a single room without any facilities and used a corner to set up a small cooking area with very simple equipment such as a kerosene burner or propane stove.

Bad living environment

Zhang (2009) suggests that there were no professional cleaners for most of the migrants’ houses. The rooms were strewn with articles for daily use, tools of production and rubbish. The community, surrounded by such clutter and noise, is described as “unbearable”. Residents were not able to access any property management for the buildings they lived in. To reduce their rent, quite a number of migrants chose to live in the suburbs or the rural-urban fringe zones. However, the daily commute to work increased their transport and time costs (Zhang, 2009). In Beijing, about 20% of migrant workers live rent-free on construction sites, sleeping on wooden boards in the part-built buildings (Chan et al, 2006). Wu (2002) highlights that there were about 3-4% of migrant

workers in Shanghai and Beijing experiencing the most terrible living conditions over a long period of time, sleeping on hospital benches and station benches.

Lack of security protection

Migrant workers living in the suburbs or rural-urban fringe zones also suffered more risks from their housing conditions. These areas are not well covered by police stations which can protect the residents from danger. It was reported that, in August 2009, Beijing Police Station closed down five underground chambers which had 320 rooms and accommodated 700 people. These basements worked as mechanical storage to the apartment houses. Migrant workers chose to live there because of the low rent (350 Yuan per month), ignoring the narrow evacuation exit and the demolished fire doors and destroyed fire refuges (Zhang, 2009). In a study on migrant workers in Beijing, Li, Q. (2003) finds that 19.6% of migrant workers were reported to be infringing housing and safety regulations in Beijing, compared with 9.4% of rural dwellers in their home villages. He assumes that the situation is more serious in other cities. He also highlights violation of regulations which were committed by migrant workers and in which areas where predominantly migrant workers lived.

About 37% of the migrant workers in cities are women, mostly married women who came to the cities with their husbands (Dang, 2006). Some migrant couples take their children with them or give birth to children after they arrive in the city. In spite of the migrant workers' low income and poor living conditions, there are still 20 million children from rural areas who have moved to cities with their migrant parents (Chan, et al, 2008; Dang, 2006; Lv, 2007). Migrant children have difficulties in entering schools in cities, as they are not registered as urban residents. They suffer from the stratified basic education system. "By the end of 2004, more than 6.4 million rural children of compulsory education

age were living with their parents in cities. However, 9.3% of them were out of school and only 31.5% of migrant youth aged 13 were still receiving education” (People’s Daily Online, 2006 as cited in Chan et al, 2008, p.157). Before 2002, migrant children were not entitled to obtain local public education.

Things have somewhat improved in recent years, as the government has modified its policy to encourage city schools to enrol children of migrant workers. But migrant workers still have to pay extra fees often in the name of “sponsorship” (*zanzhu fei*) to get school places for their children in government-run schools (Xiang, 2005). As the costs are extremely high compared with their incomes, few migrant workers are able to afford to send their children to such schools and many public schools are not able to accommodate all the migrant children (Chan et al, 2008; Dang, 2006; Lv, 2007; Xiang, 2005). To meet the huge demand of such children, privately-funded schools have been set up in areas where migrant workers cluster. Unfortunately, the facilities of such schools are not usually adequate and their teaching staff are not well qualified, their financial resources are very limited, and their performance does not compare well with that of local public schools.

The Chinese government is trying to provide migrant children with appropriate schooling. In some cities the government has offered financial assistance to some migrant schools and a law has been enacted offering migrant children an equal right to access compulsory education in their host cities (Chan et al, 2008). However, there is still a gap between policy and actual implementation. Lv (2007) indicates that migrant children are still refused by a lot of state schools. Their parents are asked for fees for their children studying in such schools on a temporary basis and donations towards school improvement are often requested. His study finds “complex registration procedures and high registration fees; children only admitted by migrant schools or schools in their hometown; and, children not being able to attend any school in cities without a

“Temporary Residential Permit” are the reasons that 50% of migrant workers leave their children in their hometown (Lv, 2007, p.71).

Furthermore, due to the place-based school enrolment system, what migrant students have studied (in the place to which they have migrated) can be quite different from the examinations that they would take in the place of origin. Furthermore, even when a child manages to enter a school in the host city, he/she has to return to the place of origin (as defined by hukou) to pass the exams for a higher level of education (e.g. from junior to senior secondary) (Xiang, 2005).

To sum up, the problems for migrant workers in cities are mainly: low income; poor living conditions; and, difficulties for their children to have access to proper education. Consequently, a large number of children whose parents migrated to cities are left behind in their hometown with different types of guardianships.

Family Structure (patterns of guardianship and its impact)

Many studies on left-behind children comment on the resulting changes in family structures and the impact this has on the children’s well-being (Fan et al., 2010; Lu & Yu, 2006; Lv, 2007; Sun & Sun, 2007; Wang et al., 2008; Ye & Murray, 2005, Ye & Pan, 2011; Zhou & Qing, 2007). Their conclusions are similar to each other, with some differences which may be accounted for by variations in definitions as outlined above. Some researchers (Li, 2002; Lv, 2007; Zhou & Qing, 2007) divide left-behind children’s guardianships into three types:

- 1) Cared for by the grandparents' generation, i.e. left-behind children are cared for by their grandparents. A large proportion of left-behind children are looked after by their grandparents when both of their parents migrate to the cities.
- 2) Cared for by the parents' generation, i.e. left-behind children are looked after by relatives of their parents' generation or their parents' friends.
- 3) Cared for themselves or looked after by other children within the family, i.e. live without a guardian. This includes being looked after by their older siblings.

The Women's Federation of Meishan (2002) surveyed 3,118 left-behind children whose parents had left them behind in rural areas. This study indicates that 81% of all the left-behind children were cared for by their grandparents; 18.3% of them were cared for by other relatives and their parents' friends and 0.7% of them lived by themselves. The Youth League Committee of Yongxing City (2001) conducted a study of 5,632 left-behind children. They found that 75.5% of them were cared for by their grandparents, 21.27% of them were cared for by other relatives and 3.17% of them lived completely alone for a considerable period of time. In a survey which was based upon a provincial census, Fan et al (2010) found that within the 2,494,495 left-behind children 74.0% were left in care of grandparents, 12.8% were being cared for by uncles/aunts and 13.2% by non-relatives.

Studies that use a broader definition also include being looked after by one of the biological parents (Jia et al., 2010; Luo, 2006; Sun & Sun, 2007; Ye & Murray, 2005; Ye & Pan, 2008; Ye & Pan, 2011). In a study on the left-behind children in the middle west of China, Ye and Murray (2005) use these categories, and conclude that being looked after by one parent dominated the four types, accounting for 79.2% of the sample. The next largest category was

being looked after by grandparents, which accounted for 16.9% of the sample. The last two types, being looked after by relatives, and cared for by the same generation (elder brothers/sisters) covered only 3.9% of the sample. On the other hand, Ye and Pan (2011) find that children looked after by grandparents accounted for 69% of all the 400 left-behind children, with a further 24% living with one parent. And 4.3% of them were cared for by other relatives and only 2.7% of them were living on their own.

	Cared for by grandparents' generation	Cared for by parents' generation	Cared for by themselves or siblings	Cared for by one parent
Guardianship divided into three types	70%-85%	10%-25%	0.5%-5%	
Guardianship divided into four types	16%-70%	2%-5%	2%-4%	25%-80%

Although there is no agreement on the types of guardianship, most researchers acknowledge that any type of guardianship would result in a significant impact on the well-being of left-behind children. The research suggests, however, that the impact varies according to the pattern of guardianships.

Cared for by the Grandparents' Generation

Normally, grandparents have a high likelihood of being the left-behind children's first guardians, even if only on a temporary basis. The natural kinship between the parents' parents and the children creates the notion that

grandparents, especially paternal grandparents, would be the first choice when the parents face having to change the care arrangements for their child. In addition, some family types already involve parents living with their married children and their grandchildren and these family types are still widespread in some part of rural China (Nie et al., 2008). In such circumstances, the grandparents looking after their grandchildren when their parents are absent is taken for granted. This also avoids any potential difficulties left-behind children would confront in moving to a new family. However, this type of guardianship inevitably produces many problems, and the literature raises questions about the grandparent's generation having significant deficiencies as adequate carers for their grandchildren.

In contrast to other types of guardianship, child-care by grandparents has some claimed advantages. Firstly, grandparents are often very fond of their grandchildren and seldom beat and/or scold them. This provides left-behind children with a home-like atmosphere. Secondly, because of this, many left-behind children have been living with their grandparents for some time; they do not need to spend time and effort adapting to a new life. Thirdly, generally speaking, left-behind children can deal with their relationship with the older generation with less conflict (Lv, 2007). This is important as it may partly eliminate the impact of the parents' migration on children's psychological well-being during the early stages of being left behind. Nevertheless, the longer they live with their grandparents the more negative influences seem to emerge. These result from the relationship between the children and the guardians as well as the guardians' growing limitations as carers.

With a natural kinship and out of the thought of compensating for the parents' absence, the older generation are more likely to spoil their left-behind grandchildren. They also often focus almost exclusively on the satisfaction of material life rather than their morality and spirituality. Effective and sufficient

discipline is sometimes lacking in the children's daily lives. Some argue that children under such child care develop rude, indulgent, overbearing and unbridled personalities (Li & Xiong, 2005; Lv, 2007; Zhou & Qing, 2007). The generation gap between the seniors and the children blocks the active communication that is essential in establishing a beneficial family atmosphere. Again, some research argues that children growing up in these circumstances tend to be silent and introverted (Lv, 2006; Zhou & Qing, 2007).

The care left-behind children receive from their grandparents is influenced by their grandparents' age, health, education level and values. Old age, poor health and low education level can render it difficult for the grandparents' generation to cope either physically or mentally with the many responsibilities that come with good child care (Li, 2002; Li & Xiong, 2005; Lv, 2007; Zhou & Qing, 2007). Apart from providing the children with basic support for daily living, they are not able to supervise their grandchild's studies. Furthermore, the importance of education is not recognised by some older people. Because of this, they do not contact the children's school teachers or raise any concerns about the children's school performance with them. If the older generation have to take care of more than one left-behind child, the influence of their incapacity on the children's well-being becomes even more difficult.

Some left-behind children have to shoulder some of the burdens of agricultural work because of the loss of adult labourers in the fields, following the migration of their parents. As shown below, this impacts on them by making them tired for school work during the day and on their capacity to do prescribed homework. The extra work the children carry impacts in several ways upon the process of growing-up. In addition, some left-behind children also have to take care of their old grandparents when they are ill through what Lv calls "retro-guardianship" (i.e. acting as a young carer of grandparents who are in poor health) (Lv, 2007, p.99). Both these situations result in "the declining

quality of care for left-behind children” Lv (2007, p.95).

Lv argues that what he defines as “incompetence” is embodied in two aspects. The first relates to a set of factors concerning the guardians’ age. In his study, 80% of the guardians are older than 60. Some of them are very weak and have diseases, disabilities and chronic illnesses. Thus, the children, particularly those in primary school, suffer neglect. Some of their parents report that their grandparents do not concern themselves with the children’s food and hygiene. In some extreme cases, children did not get a change of clothes for more than half a month. The second set of factors relate to the cumulative impact of their responsibilities. Lv argues that initially they may be able to take care of one child but that the quality of care declines if they are asked to look after more than two left-behind children. More than 60% of the 187 guardians in his study were required to take care of two or more children. Apart from looking after their own left-behind grandchildren, these older guardians also had to take responsibility for their land and for other migrant relatives’ land which inevitably reduced the time they had to focus on the children. Furthermore, some left-behind children in such families had to shoulder more household duties such as cooking and doing the laundry (Lv, 2007).

Most of the research reviewed in this chapter focuses almost exclusively on the negative results of being looked after by grandparents. It is rare to find any of the advantages of such arrangements being mentioned and few address its merits compared to other types of arrangements. Furthermore, the data they present merely demonstrates the left-behinds’ status only at one point in time. This leaves many questions unaddressed. For instance, if the grandparents were indeed fit and well-educated, was the caring outcome for children much better? Few researchers are clear about at what stage of being looked after by grandparents the situation begins to deteriorate, or whether being looked after by them was harmful from the very first moment. What was the relationship like

between the grandparents and the left-behind children before the children's parents went to the city? Did the interactive pattern change after the older generation took full responsibility for the children, or was it some time after this that things began to go wrong? These questions need to be more carefully addressed through a longitudinal study of care.

Cared for by the Parents' Generation

If the children's grandparents are dead or are not available for other reasons, the parents will sometimes turn to their siblings or friends for help. Like grandparents, siblings and friends who take care of the left-behind children also tend to pay more attention to the material conditions of care, but less or no attention is given to the cultivation of good behaviour and habits or meeting their psychological needs (Lv, 2007; Ruan, 2008; Wang, 2008; Ye, 2005; Zhou & Qing, 2007). Zhou & Qing find that only 4.5% of left-behind children were cared for by their parents' generation. This category includes situations in which the child was looked after by uncles, teachers and good friends of the parents. Firstly, in their survey, these sorts of guardians tend to give first priority to the safety of the children. These guardians mainly focused on the child's material conditions for which they knew they would have to account to the parents. Such guardians are said not to dare to discipline the children too much. But they were concerned about their physical safety, as it would be hard to explain to the parents if the children had run away or been involved in accidents. But they were wary of situations in which left-behind children might report harsh treatment to their parents (Zhou & Qing, 2007, p35). A concern for safety did seem paramount, with some incidents of "strict discipline" being reported, in which the guardians had locked the left-behind children at home and not allow them to play with other children. Secondly, it is argued that because the relationship with the guardians is not one of close blood, this

impacts on the closeness of such a relationship. In particular, when the children compare their guardians' attitudes to their own children with the attitude to themselves, the feeling of being treated differently became quite marked. Many left-behind children said they were uncomfortable and did not feel at home in the house of a person such as their uncle. Therefore, this type of guardianship may have had an impact upon the children's emotional and psychological development.

Some studies classify the characteristics of this type of guardianship and the dilemmas the guardians confront. Lv's study (2007), for instance, presents quite a detailed picture of the characteristics of this type. Others are much less clear about whether they share particular characteristics and how these are thought to impact upon the well-being of children, as in Wang's case study of a left-behind girl cared for by her uncle (Wang, 2008).

Lv (2007) finds 10% of left-behind children who participated in a questionnaire survey were living with guardians from their parents' generation. Most of their guardians were less than 50 years of age. Lv finds that this group of guardians had their own advantages in terms of age and education level compared with the children's grandparents and that, perhaps because of these characteristics, this type of guardianship has a more negative impact on children's physical and psychological development. He states that most of these guardians are the parents' relatives or friends, but that the children looked after by them do not have a natural sense of belonging to them. Rather, left-behind children tended to feel that they were merely "living under another's roof". To please the guardians, some left-behind children are reported as trying to do more housework for their host and eating less food. They also experienced the absence of emotional support from such surrogate parents. Their surrogate parents might also have their own children living with them. Left-behind children could sense the different treatment from the adults to them and their

counterparts. Secondly, it was reported that such guardianship were often not very stable and placements often broke down. This was much more likely than in cases where children were being looked after by their grandparents. The guardians from the parents' generation were also much more likely to have their own children. Conflicts between their own children and the left-behind children were sometimes the source of the relationship breaking down and alternative arrangements for care needing to be sought.

Based on the findings of this type of research, compared with the guardians' competence, the relationship between guardians and children has a more significant impact on the left-behind children's well-being. It seems that the nature of the responsibility the guardians should take is not clarified, or it was accepted as being limited to just basic living. On the one hand, without direct kinship, the guardians are reluctant to or do not feel entitled to shoulder full responsibility for things like the behaviour of the left-behind child, their discipline, education or the supervision of their studies, nor of their psychological well-being. If they have their own children to look after or heavy work to do, the children who have joined their family just for a period of time are more likely to be ignored. The situation gets worse if the guardians are incompetent or not conscientious. On the other hand, children under these circumstances tend to treat their guardians as authority-figures. They are more likely to adopt a passive perspective and develop withdrawal and evasive strategies to cope with the strangeness they feel with their new guardians. This means that the impact of this type of guardianship may well be considerably worse than that of grandparents, especially concerning their daily life, their education and their emotional well-being (Ye & Pan, 2008).

Professional Surrogate Parents

Most researchers (Lv, 2007; Ruan, 2008; Wang, 2008; Ye, 2005; Zhou & Qing, 2007) considered that being cared for by the parents' generation had a worse impact on children's growth than being looked after by their grandparents. However, the rise of professional surrogate parents partly revised this widespread notion.

With the improvement of migrants' living standards, and a refining of social division of labour and the enhancement of market consciousness, the development of professional surrogate parents has begun to be developed in Hubei, Anhui and Henan provinces. Professional surrogate parents are similar (but slightly different) to the development of surrogate family which will be referred to latter. The professional surrogate parents are employed by the left-behind children's parents and are responsible for the children's daily life and reporting to their parents regularly on aspects of their welfare and well-being (Ye, 2008). The surrogate parents will demand fees and provide the children with accommodation, food and supervision of the children's study. In Anhui Province, most professional surrogate parents are women. Some of them look after the left-behind children and work on the farm, whilst others take care of the children as their principle or sole occupation. Professional surrogate parents in this area are mainly relatives or neighbours of the left-behind children. There is often no explicit or contractual description of the range of their responsibilities.

Ye (2008) categorises the features of the professional surrogate parents in the following terms:

“Usually one professional surrogate parent cares for several left-behind children. They provide a:

Settled house as their accommodation;

They are living with the children.

Not only do they look after the children's life they also supervise the children's study;

There are two forms of surrogation:

full-time nursery and

part-time nursery.

Full-time nursery referred to children living with surrogate parents;

Part-time referred to children supervised by the surrogate parents after school (but who are still) live at home;

The majority of professional surrogate parents are laid-off non-state private female teachers in their 40s."

(Ye, 2008, p.118)

Both the reports and research suggest that professional surrogate parents are mainly propitious to the welfare and well-being of left-behind children. First, the professional surrogate parents take good care of the left-behind children and have a particularly good reputation as regards their vocational needs. Second, left-behind children get support for their schoolwork from the professional surrogate parents. As most of the professional parents used to teach in primary or middle school, they can use their teaching experience to supervise the children's study. Third, left-behind children feel concern and love from their new guardians. The professional surrogate parents and the environment they provide partly offset the lack of their migrant parents' love and concern. The professional surrogate parents are not only responsible for the children's daily life, safety and study; they also show concern for their behaviour and psychological development. Some professional guardians take care of a lot of left-behind children at the same time. The communication and support from friends living together could also remedy them missing their parents and

eliminate their feelings of loneliness. Fourthly, the emergence of professional surrogate parents reduces the migrant parents' worries, and some of the burdens which fall on other guardians. This is particularly true of children attending part-time nursery care (Ye, 2008). Parents of left-behind children could then better focus on their work and thus improve their life-chances.

Every coin has two sides and the professional surrogate parent situation is not flawless. Therefore, its shortcomings also need to be highlighted. Ye (2008) analyses the limitations based on his research. Some professional surrogate parents do not disclose their 'part-time job', as both their vocation and their responsibility are the source of some embarrassment. Furthermore, some school teachers also work as professional surrogate parents, which break the school regulations, as teachers are not allowed to engage in the commercial supervision of children.

The children's feelings of missing their parents are long-lasting and intense. Furthermore, when some children realise that the care of professional surrogate parents is paid for, they may withdraw from communication with them and react differently emotionally to them.

Most surrogate parents are introduced by friends or relatives. There is no contract or agreement between them and the parents, nor are their responsibilities made explicit. Disputes and conflict between parents and surrogate parents are mainly the result of something happening to the children. Local government has not constituted any regulations to supervise and administer this new vocation. The professional surrogate parents' abilities and competences are not standardised or specified in terms of age, family situation or level of expertise. Consequently they take care of the left-behind children in different ways. Children could be affected by their surrogate parents' family problems, such as conflicts between couples. Most professional surrogate

parents look after more than one left-behind child. Thus, compared to the care from their parents, the care given by surrogate parents is less attentive and satisfactory. Some surrogate parents confine the children to the strict boundaries of their home to avoid any risks, such as car accidents or abduction. This restriction can make the children unhappy to a certain extent.

Surrogate Families

A 'surrogate family' refers to, "the type of guardianship, whether state or private, which takes the role of the children's parents, getting the left-behind children together, and looking after them in a family-style environment" (Ye, 2008, p.126). Professional surrogate parents are one form of surrogate family. However, compared to surrogate parents, surrogate families typically are much larger and accommodate many more children and have many more people getting involved in providing professional support for the children, such as the managers and the teachers employed to supervise children's studying. Usually, managers of surrogate families are not engaged in any other job. Most "surrogate parents", however, take this care-giving as a part-time job in addition to their main occupation.. Additionally, there is a contract between the manager and parents before a child moves into a surrogate family. Ye (2008) who studied two surrogate families in Si Chuan Province, argues that surrogate families in particular are of great significance in offering solutions to the problems associated with left-behind children.

Firstly, surrogate families can function as natural families and they have advantages compared with other forms of guardianship: because they are based on a legal trust relationship between the guardians and parents, the left-behind children's life and security is guarded; the guardians are able to supervise the children's study; they have the support of local government and

schools; and, some surrogate families prove capable of providing a range of extra-curricular activities.

Secondly, left-behind children living in surrogate families are more likely to develop an ability to care for themselves and gain some measure of independence compared with the left-behind children who are spoiled by their grandparents

Thirdly, left-behind children living or spending some time in surrogate families are less lonely because they are in daily contact with other left-behind children. Surrogate families give them plenty of opportunity to be in daily communication with their classmates and other peer groups. The emotional support from their friends and the various after-school activities launched by the managers alleviate or eliminate the left-behind children's sense of loneliness (Ye, 2008, p.131-134).

As a new type of guardianship, the surrogate families functions by providing left-behind children with a proper daily routine, security and educational support, emancipating their guardians from heavy routine, security and educational support, freeing their guardians from a heavy burden of care. Nevertheless, there are still restraints and disadvantages in the development and operation of surrogate families (Ye, 2008, p.134-135).

Lack of investment is the principal obstacles confronting most surrogate families. The financial support from the government and other people is insufficient. In this situation, the surrogate merely meets the basic needs of the children. It is hard for them to supply better facilities.

Lack of standardized service and management. As a new vocation, there is no settled pattern that could be referred to with regard to the establishment of an

institution and definition of the service.

Left-behind children's emotional needs and mental problems tend to be neglected. The surrogation agreement signed by the left-behind children's guardians focuses only on responsibility for the children's basic living and security, while ignoring the method of discipline. The surrogate guardians tend to simplify their mission to 'guarding' and 'managing'. Consequently, the children's safety and their performance at school is given priority and their emotional demands are overlooked.

Surrogate families are not widely accepted. There are three factors determining whether parents wish to turn to surrogate families for their children's care: firstly, whether they are able to afford the surrogating fees; secondly, though it is hard work to look after grandchildren, the seniors might still want to be with the children which might provide them with companionship and consolation for their missing parents; thirdly, some children prefer a family they are familiar with rather than a strange, new environment. Therefore, they might refuse to live in a surrogate family.

The emergence of surrogate families, including professional surrogate parents, is a type of social concern and social assistance for left-behind children who have been neglected for a long time. Although this form of guardianship cannot replace their family, which meets their needs for primary socialisation and personality stabilisation, it could work as a remedy for the absence of parents. The establishment of surrogate families should be encouraged. Recommendations will be referred to in the last chapter.

Self-guardianship

Normally left-behind children who look after themselves are in middle school, by which time the school may provide some accommodation for them and they will be left unsupervised by adults only at weekends (Lv, 2007). Zhou and Qing categorise the characteristics of this type of guardianship in the following terms: their parents try their best to meet the children's needs but this sometimes might lead to being extravagant to the children; this sort of care arrangement may lead to an absence of discipline and support from adults and circumstances in which it may be more likely that they will get involved in juvenile delinquency. Children left in such circumstances are also reported to lack confidence and to hold a more passive attitude towards life and be lacking in self efficacy. The *Committee for Caring about the Next Generation* in Si Chuan Province (2006), however, argues that the children who partly take care of themselves can go into one of two extremes. Some children, who have strong self-discipline, are more confident and socially aware and responsible compared with the children living in 'intact' families. However, children who lack self-discipline are vulnerable and potentially have a bad influence on the society around them. Some of this latter group do not attend school, indulge themselves in online games and engage in early sexual experimentation. However, regarding this type of guardianship overall, Ye and Murray (2005) come to the stark conclusion that children who are living on their own are more independent and considerate, although they have to take on all the household responsibilities, which may lead to some injuries. However, contrary to Zhou and Qing (2007), Ye and Murray find that left-behind children who look after themselves do not always have sufficient financial support, and that it was this which aggravated the hardship of their lives.

Change in Guardianships over Time

According to Ye and Pan (2011), in their study, 80% of left-behind children had experienced a change of guardians as a result of “illness, death, returning parent or parents, and attendance at a school in a new and distant location”(p.363).

In addition, Lv (2007) finds that being left behind is not a static situation and the circumstances of care were subject to change. In his study, almost half of the left-behind children initially migrated with their parents. He divided the ‘dynamic left-behind’ into three types. The first type involved children who were initially left in their home villages when their parents migrated. Then when their parents were settled they joined them in the city where their new work was located. The third phase saw them return to their home village when life in the city became too difficult for them. The second group of children were born in the city or migrated when their parents migrated. Some of this group finished primary school (7-12) in the city where their parents had migrated and returned to their rural hometowns when they were ready for secondary school. A third group was comprised of children who did not live with their migrating parents once they had moved to the city. Overall, only a minority of children migrated with their parents. However, the patterns of care were found to change over time. Lv states that 95% of left-behind children who experienced migration with their parents returned home before they went to middle school.

According to the parents, there are two reasons accounting for this. The first is that there are a lot of primary schools, with relatively low tuition fees for migrant children. Public middle schools, on the other hand, are very expensive and parents could not afford them. Thus, even where the children migrated too, it was only until they reached the age of transfer to middle school, after which

they were sent back to attend school in their hometown. The second is that left-behind children in primary school were lacking self-discipline. The parents worried when their children were living with other people. The dynamics of being left-behind not only increased the children's living expenses but also affected their physical and psychological development.

The other forms of guardianship transformation referred to in the preceding paragraphs (Ye, 2008), from care of relatives to the care of surrogate family, are more active and positive than the "dynamics of being left-behind" put forward by Lv (2007). The change of guardians indicates that parents started to consider their left-behind children's well-being in a rounded manner rather than seeing money alone as the only compensation for their migration. Furthermore, more choices and support for both parents and children from government organisations and individuals were beginning to be developed, giving them more realistic choices of care for their children. Nevertheless, the availability of surrogate families is still not widespread.

The following section examines the range of evidence on the influences of being left behind on the children's daily life, their education, their behaviour and their social relationships, as well as exploring the impact of being left behind on their psychological well-being and safety.

The Impact of Parents' Migration on Left-Behind Children

In "normal" nuclear or stem families, family members communicate with each other based on face-to-face interaction. In the case of separation,

communication is more difficult and takes place sometimes over a long distance, with little chance of a swift meeting between parents and child.

Since parents are working away in far-off cities, left-behind children face new guardians and a very different new home environment. The culture, mentality and relationships implicated in attitude, life-style and family activities comprise the environment that affect a child's growth. The new guardians function as the representatives of this home environment. Some guardians have known weaknesses such as being old, having poor health and low levels of educational experience or attainment. Because of this, the children's well-being cannot be guaranteed. The status of the life of left-behind children, concerning various aspects of their welfare including daily life, education, emotions, behaviour and social intercourse, is discussed below.

The Impact of Parents' Migration on the Daily Life of Left-Behind Children

Food and domestic work are the factors that researchers employ to examine the daily life of the left-behind children (Lv, 2007; Mei, 2006; Ye & Murray, 2005; Ye & Pan, 2008; Ye & Pan, 2011; Zhou & Qing, 2007).

Daily diet is considered to be an important factor in evaluating the quality of life of left-behind children (Lv, 2007; Mei, 2006; Ye, 2005; Ye & Pan, 2008; Zhou & Qing, 2007). Zhou and Qing (2008) generalise the food situation of the left-behind children, by claiming that their guardians only provide them with a "basic" or "adequate" diet, but one which is not based on an understanding of the importance of nutrition for children's health. Irregular, unhygienic and unhealthy food was often given to children. Some children were not able to have their meals on time, as their guardians were occupied with farm work in

busy seasons. A large proportion of guardians did not pay sufficient attention to food sanitation and fed the children with unhygienic food.

Without effective discipline and control on pocket money, some left-behind children lived on snack food rather than being given proper meals. This kind of unhealthy food impaired some left-behind children's health, something that was frequently reported. As most grandparents were thrifty, they also tended to buy cheap food of poor quality for their grandchildren. It was reported that some grandparents often brought rotting fruit, cutting off the rotten part and feeding the rest to their children (Zhou & Qing, 2007, p.46).

Lv (2007) reports on the daily diet of left-behind children, looking at how often they ate meat, eggs, vegetables, fruit and milk. He found that the majority of left-behind children had meat and eggs 0~3 times a week, but more than 50% of left-behind children ate meat and eggs less than twice a week. Only 72% of left-behind children had vegetable to eat once a day, and 14% of them only ate vegetable 0~3 times per week. Compared with vegetables, fruit was more of a luxury to them. Fifty eight per cent of left-behind children had fruit to eat 0~3 times a week in summer and autumn when the price of fruit is low. Milk powder was often used instead of fresh milk, as the latter was not available in most rural areas. Even so, only 4.8% of left-behind children had this every day. He argued that although children were given enough simple food, their guardians did not have sufficient regard for the nutritional standards of the food they served and because of this the children's diet was of a low standard. The vast majority of left-behind children (88%) reported that they had much better food when they were living with their parents. Their life was thus not significantly improved due to their parents' migration, indeed the reverse, it was worsened (Lv, 2007).

Both the studies reviewed above only investigated the food that left-behind

children had, without any comparison to other children in intact families. The gap between different foods in different family forms is unclear. The left-behind children living in better-off families might have had more desirable food than children from disadvantaged backgrounds with both parents staying at home. Furthermore, the lack of a nutritious diet is known to be common in rural areas (Ruan, 2008; Xiang, 2005). Therefore, it should not necessarily be concluded that the data Lv obtained only reveals the living standards which pertain to the left-behind children compared with the living standards when their parents were at home. Ye and Murray (2005) compare the satisfaction level of children in different family structures. A greater proportion of children in intact families were very satisfied with their meals than left-behind children. Left-behind children cared for by their parents' generation reported the least satisfaction with their diet, with only 42.9% satisfied with their food. This was a smaller proportion than the 54% of left-behind children living with their grandparents (Ye & Pan, 2008).

Since the large-scale migration of rural labourers into the cities, there are now only women, children and old people left in some villages which have become "shell villages" (*kongke cun*) (Xiang, 2005). He further defines this concept, "They are "shell villages" because they do not have any productive public assets and also because outmigration has emptied them of able labourers." (Xiang, 2005, p.22) Consequently, the farm work has been passed on to the left-behind children and the old people. Left-behind children are required not only to do domestic work such as washing dishes and washing their own clothes, but also assist in looking after poultry and working on the farm in busy seasons (Lv, 2007; Ye & Murray, 2005; Ye & Pan, 2008; Zhou & Qing, 2007). Lv (2007) shows 57% of left-behind children doing more housework after their parents went to the city. Most of them did not do so very willingly, but agreed to such tasks to please their guardians. Lv notes that because of heavy housework duties, some left-behind children did not have

sufficient time to do their homework or to play with other children. Many got to school late. Ye and Murray (2005) also report on changes to the amount of housework and farm work done by left-behind children. He concludes that the farm work done by left-behind children increased significantly after their parents migrated. A large portion of left-behind children claimed that they hardly did any farm work when their parents were at home. Secondly, the amount of housework left-behind children had also increased substantially, with nearly all left-behind children in his research claiming they did such duties very often. Interestingly, this research also reports that left-behind children living with people other than their grandparents tended to shoulder more of the workload than children living with their grandparents.

Analyses show that following the migration of parents, much of the burden of extra work fell on grandparents as well as the children (Lv, 2007; Ye & Murray, 2005; Ye & Pan, 2008; Zhou & Qing, 2007). This had an impact on their other duties including their attitudes to caring for their grandchildren. The response of both parents and grandparents to these changes is often overlooked, but these will be given much clearer focus in subsequent chapters.

The Impact of Parents' Migration on the Education of Left-Behind Children

The changes in family structure following migration inevitably influenced the left-behind children's education. The competence, attitudes and values of the guardians and their relationship with the children led to changes in the feedback about studying and support for school education.

When parents migrate, the frequency of communication and contact between parents and children is reduced. This greatly weakens the influence of the

primary family unit on the children and results in a diminution of socialisation during the period of compulsory education. Neither parents nor grandparents have time to take their children out to broaden their horizons or enrich their knowledge, which has disadvantageous consequences for the children's development (Li, 2004). Yet, children were objectively in a position to widen their knowledge of the world beyond the villages in which they lived, as they were more likely to visit a city than the children whose parents staying at home.

In many families, the capacity of the guardians determined that the children were not able to achieve sufficient tutoring and supervision for their studies (Chen, 2005; Jiang, 2005; Ye & Murray, 2005; Yu, 2006; Zhou & Qing, 2007). Ye and Murray (2005) indicate that grandparents who were old had poor memories. They have generally had a much worse education than the children's parents. Thus, the children have no tuition or obtain it only from older children. Since they are not family members, children living with the parents' generation tend to care much less about their studies. Few of their guardians are willing to tutor them, partly because of a lack of ability and partly because they have no time to do so. Concerning supervision, grandparents seemed very limited in their ability to push their grandchildren to complete homework, or even, during busy farming periods, to ensure that they attended school on time.

Some authors argue that there is evidence that grandparents do not pay school fees on time, despite receiving an increase in the household income from the parents of left-behind children following their migration (Lv, 2007; Ye & Murray, 2005). Fifteen percent of left-behind children were not able to pay their tuition fees on time. "No money at home" was the direct cause mentioned by 70% of the left-behind children who faced the embarrassment of this in front of their peer group. The embarrassment and stress would not disappear until the fees were paid. Their motivation to study could also be affected by this in the

long term. Ye and Murray argue that:

“In pedagogical terms, the primary school stage is very important for children to develop good study habits, and the absence of parents in this period can result in ineffective guidance and management of their studies, which in turn influences progress and building of self-confidence etc. in the future.”

(Ye & Murray, 2005, p.81)

In addition, different values and concepts concerning education presented to left-behind children by their guardians would influence their motivation to study (Zhou & Qing, 2007; Ye & Murray, 2005). Some guardians underestimate their importance and influence on the children's education. They think that education is the responsibility of the school and they only need to keep the children safe and healthy. Very few guardians ever attend the guardians' meeting organised by the school, and some had no idea about when these were held and what they were about. There is very little social interaction between schools and guardians (Ye & Murray, 2005). The belief that schooling is worthless, held by some guardians, is passed on to the children (Yao, 2005; Yang, 2004; Ye & Murray, 2005; Zhou & Qing, 2007). Nearly 20% of left-behind children were found to accept this idea (Zhou & Qing, 2007). Lv (2007), however, did not accept such a claim maintaining that, it might be true only of some areas, particularly ones in which, despite low educational attainment, workers could still earn high wages.

Some left-behind children invest lots of time on non-school work which would undoubtedly impact upon their school performance (Lv, 2007; Ye & Murray, 2005; Zhou & Qing, 2007). Missing their migrant parents would also impact on their concentration levels at school (Lv, 2007; Ye & Murray, 2005). Many left-behind children reported that “lack of supervision” and “distraction due to

missing their parents” were the most insurmountable difficulties to their study (Lv, 2007). However, direct study of their emotional development was rarely included in the research reviewed here; neither was the dynamic relationship between workload, psychological well-being and school performance. For this reason, it will be a focus of the research in this thesis.

The impact of parents’ migration reported in previous research are rather mixed; some left-behind children, who understood their parents’ hardship, studied harder for a while; others lost interest and the incentive to study; and, some dropped out of school to pursue a career (Yang, 2004; Ye & Murray, 2005). However, Ye & Murray do not really explore why such different reactions occur. Lv argues that the parents’ migration did not always create a significant negative impact on children’s attitude to study (2007).

In schools, most school teachers considered left-behind children as hard to educate. Because of this, they gave up disciplining left-behind children as long as they were conforming to school regulations. Furthermore, there was little interaction between schools and carers, as a result of the teachers’ heavy teaching load and the guardians’ failure to attend school meetings (Zhou & Qing, 2007).

One of the main indicators taken as the output of these changes is school performance. However, different authors seem to reach different conclusions. Some researchers suggest that there is no significant impact on school performance as a result of their parents’ migration. Zhu et al (2002) proposes that there was not much difference on the study behaviour between left-behind students and other students. On the other hand, some researchers insist that there is a markedly negative effect resulting from the parents’ migration. Most surveys carried out by local Women’s Federations supported the latter point of view.

For instance, the *Women's Federation* (2002) of Pingxing City investigated the left-behind children in that city, finding that most left-behind children performed badly at school. The survey indicates that less than 20% of the left-behind children achieve a 'distinction', 80% of them were 'average' or 'below average', while some get only 30-40% in the compulsory courses. Some did not like school and some had low attendance rates.

School teachers also report a decline in school performance from left-behind children after their parents migrate. Children living with their parents' generation as guardians are reported as showing the worst drop in examination marks; more than 85% of them were performing at the level of average or below (Ye & Murray, 2005). Other studies rely upon self-reported educational scores. These indicate that both the children themselves and their parents reported the children's school performance as average or above (Lv, 2007). In this case, the data collected from different sources did not always indicate the same situation. This suggests the need for triangulation of data from more than one source.

In summary, most researchers agree that separation between parents and children had an adverse impact on the left-behind children's education, although different authors argue that this happens in different ways. Sometimes this seems to be because of a lack of efficient communication between parents and children. Others argue it was more to do with the competence of the guardians, or their ignorance of, or attitude towards education. Yet others posit that it was because of the emotional distraction of missing their parents, or the reduced time the children had for study because of other responsibilities. Due to different researchers and research methods, there is not agreement in the literature on whether parents' migration has a significant negative impact on left-behind children's school performance. This is despite the fact that school performance is accepted as being the most

important indicator of the quality of their children's education. Also absent from the literature was any systematic examination of how this changed over time. The research reported on in this thesis focuses on the process and relationships within the causes and between them and their outcomes.

The Impacts of Parents' Migration on the Emotions and Behaviour of Left-Behind Children

In the process of children growing up, family structure, care and discipline from both parents is of great significance to the development of children's emotions and formation of desirable behaviour. Both Fan and Wang argue that left-behind children are more likely to fall into the category of problematic children in terms of psychological problems, defective personalities and aberrant behaviour due to a lack of parental protection, care, discipline and the communication and contact between parent-child, particularly if they are left behind early in life for long periods (Fan et al, 2009; Wang, 2008).

A missing sense of stability and safety in an intact family goes against children's healthy growth and socialisation (Fan et al, 2009; Lv, 2007; Sun & Sun, 2007; Wang, 2008; Wang et al, 2008; Ye, 2005 & Murray; Zhan & Zhang, 2005). Due to the long-term absence of their parents, they gradually lose their sense of being protected, which leads to a failure to establish a sense of security and trust in the outside world. Hence, some left-behind children's behaviour and characters become polarised. The lack of parental protection, especially the father's role as a protective umbrella for the family, made some left-behind children become awkward, introverted, silent, pessimistic and solitary, and feel humiliated with a lack of self-esteem. Left-behind children, in such cases, have more likelihood of becoming frightened and anxious. Wang et al (2010) find that left-behind children in Chongqing and Gui Zhou Province

have higher anxiety and depression levels due to the low quantity and quality of parent-child contact. Left-behind also tend to adopt withdrawal strategies or extreme strategies to deal with the challenges they confront in their surrogate family or outside (Lv, 2007; Wang, 2008). Thirty percent of left-behind children in Lv's survey reported that they would keep silent when they were bullied. This not only suggests the passive actions which they take when facing unfavourable treatment, but also suggest the missing communication and contact with both their parents and their guardians.

For most of the year, left-behind children and their parents live in different worlds, which controls the impossibility of direct face-to-face communication and contact whenever it is demanded. When the parents are working away they can only use indirect means to express their care and love and to monitor their children's well-being. The main contact between left-behind children and their parents is by telephone (Lv, 2007; Ye & Murray, 2005; Zhou & Qing, 2007). Most of the previous studies show that the contact frequency between left-behind children and their parents is either low or with no contact at all. More than half of the left-behind children report that they talk with their parent only briefly (for less than 3 minutes) and infrequently (less than twice a month). Parents are also mostly concerned more about their children's school performance, whilst enquiries about their emotional needs were largely absent. Even though they did not visit each other very often, school performance was still given first priority. The absence of sufficient contact and communication between parents and the children they had left at home was not remedied by the interaction between left-behind children and their guardians. More than 25% of left-behind children seldom or never talk to their guardians and less than 20% of left-behind children share their personal issues with their guardians with 30% of them keeping problems to themselves. Compared with not-left-behind children, they are less communicative, less active and confident and lonelier. Left-behind children's interest in life was reduced owing to their parents'

ignoring them and the pressure caused by this, which increased concerns for their new family, relationships, life-style etc., and also increased worries to their migrant parents about the children's health and safety (Lin, 2002; Lv, 2007; Ye & Pan, 2008).

Correct guidance and discipline are essential for children, who are at a stage of rapid physical and mental development, in order for them to understand the changes in themselves, their study demands and personal interactions. However, being separated from parents, and with guardians finding little time, or with negligence from both of them, the situation is difficult for them. Ye & Murray put this as follows:

"Such a situation is extremely unfavourable to children's psychological well-being, and can lead to a variety of psychological disturbances such as self-pity, self-abandonment, lacking self-confidence and being pessimistic and negative, or incommunicative, wilful and selfish."

(Ye & Murray, 2005, p.86).

Some researchers maintain that because most guardians did not fulfil their responsibility to guide and discipline the children in their care, many left-behind children turned out to be spoiled and developed unsociable behaviour. At school many did not respect rules and regulations, smoked, got drunk, lied, stole and got into fight. Some of them indulge in electronic games or become involved in extortion and drug taking. However, at this stage, their guardians are not able or reluctant to discipline them and leave them alone (Gao et al, 2010; Huang & Liu, 2004; Lin, 2004; Li, 2004; Zhou & Qing, 2007). Therefore left-behind children are more likely to be blamed for the increasing juvenile delinquency in rural areas. Some extreme cases exposed by the mass media create an even more negative reception for this group of children. In most literature, both parents and children seem to be treated as the "passive victims"

in the sense that little attempt is made to explore the processes through which these outcomes are produced. The process of how they changed within a new family system is not well revealed by previous studies. Neither do any studies indicate parents' responses to such changes in their children's behaviour and emotions. Furthermore, the ways in which the children's psychological well-being interacts with other aspects of their well-being and welfare is absent from the current literature.

The Impacts of Parents' Migration on Social Intercourse of Left-Behind Children

Social intercourse is the interaction and communication between human beings through which people exchange information and express emotions. It is necessary to understand left-behind children's experiences of social intercourse, which is basically needed for their development and well-being.

According to a study on the left-behind children in 10 villages, there was no significant difference between left-behind children and not-left-behind children in the people they affiliated with. However, their relationship with their migrant parents became looser, but the relationship with close related actors, such as classmates, guardians and teachers, was strengthened. Concerning friendship, making contacts and relationship intensity was influenced by their parents' migration, as the left-behind children tended to confide in friends "as they were reluctant to tell their guardians what is on their minds as they may then worry about them" (Ye & Murray, 2005, p.68).

Some left-behind children were forced to stay at home for safety reasons, which limited their interactions. In addition, some left-behind children had to give a hand on the farm or do housework in their spare time. Hence, the sphere

for social intercourse was narrowed. On the contrary, Ye and Murray found that due to the inadequacy of their guardians' supervision and lack of discipline, some left-behind children got involved with undesirable people, and later developed into 'problematic children'. The children cared for by their grandparents were more likely to fall into this category (Ye & Murray, 2005).

Similarly, Lv (2007) finds that the left-behind children establish more frequent communication and contact with their guardians than with their migrant parents. Furthermore, they had more chance of interacting with community members other than the people relevant to their family and school, such as shop assistants. They place more trust in and give more attention to their friends, who may provide more support to their life, study and emotional well-being. Positive social intercourse is beneficial to their socialisation and well-being. Yet, without sufficient discipline left-behind children were more vulnerable to becoming hooligans and cultivating a diversity of harmful habits. Some of them even embarked on the criminal road (Huang & Liu, 2004; Lv, 2007; Nie et al., 2008; Zhou & Qing, 2007).

Conclusions and the Emerging Research Aims

This chapter reviews a wide range of recent research literature on the economic migration of parents from rural China and the resultant plight of "left-behind children". Current literature and previous studies both contribute to an understanding of the issues.

Because of loose government control on social migration, as well as higher income for potential migrants, better infrastructural facilities and changes in public services, large numbers of rural workers have migrated to the cities. As

a consequence of this, the children of migrant workers can be divided into two groups: migrant children and left-behind children. But the two groups are not fixed and unchangeable. Every left-behind is a potential migrant child; and it is possible for some migrants to send their children back home to live in rural villages. Because of this, it is of great importance to treat left-behind children as a dynamic concept from the beginning. To understand the process of being left behind, it is necessary to examine the structural setting of parents working away, which influences their decision to leave their children at home.

The discussion in this chapter also suggests the importance of understanding the context of decision making within the Household Registration System. This implies that the low income earned by migrant workers, and the poor working and living conditions, all stack the odds in terms of the likelihood that they will leave their children at home. Unequal entitlement to education and the structure of schooling also influence their decisions to send their children back home. The dual social structure of 'urban' and 'rural' areas based on the Household Registration System has impacted on the education of the children of migrants and on their decision to leave them behind. Rural migrants living in cities who are classified as rural residents are not able to enjoy the same welfare rights, such as public housing services, medical services, employment services, as their urban counterparts. Their children are not able to access public schools without paying high tuition fees. Therefore, this dual social structure makes it virtually impossible for rural workers to take their children with them when they seek work in the city.

If and when children are left behind, who should take responsibility for taking care of them is a serious question, of lasting importance. Most research into left-behind children reviewed in this chapter categorized the existing guardianships in the following way: cared for by the grandparent's generation, cared for by the parent's generation, and cared for by someone from the same

generation. The characteristics and impact of each surrogate arrangement have been discussed by many researchers, with most using only a static categorization system which does not recognise how some surrogate care arrangements can, and do change over time. Much of the literature also points to both parents and children falling victim to negative influences, with bold claims about findings which mainly point to the adverse welfare consequences for children of this changing family structure.

As shown above, some patterns of child care are seen as being preferable to others; with grandparent's care especially only focusing on material factors, to the detriment of the child's educational development. Yet such conclusions seem to rely upon assumptions about grandparents in general rather than any examined variation between different grandparents. They are all assumed to be old, frail, subject to illness, uneducated (and unsympathetic to the importance of both school work and studying at home which might enhance that). Grandparents as a category are assumed to be more indulgent and less inclined to disciplining and controlling the wayward behaviour of their grandchildren. Yet, as argued above, surely there is variation in competences and behaviours between different grandparents? Are younger, fitter, better educated grandparents more likely to be immune from accusations of incompetence? And, if grandparents do become less able to care for their grandchildren as, over time, they do become older, frailer, or subject to chronic illness, surely this suggests changes in their competence over time. In short, whilst not wanting to contradict the conclusions on the ability of grandparents on average, the very universality of conclusions about them suggests the importance of treating "competence to care" as a dynamic concept likely to change over time.

This chapter has also drawn attention to the recent discovery in the literature of forms of professional surrogate care. It has reviewed many of the findings

claimed by research about the effectiveness of such care in promoting and protecting the well-being of children when parents leave them behind in their economic migration to far-away cities. Knowledge about such systems of care support is relatively recent, and was not known to this researcher ahead of the fieldwork on which this thesis reports. This chapter reviews two main types of professional surrogate care: professional surrogate parents and professional surrogate family. It also comments on variations in these patterns of support, in terms of the amount of time spent with the professional carers, the size of the surrogate family, and the range of roles fulfilled by the professional carers. The literature and research reviewed in this chapter is mainly positive about the impact of these new patterns of care. Yet given that it varies so much in nature and extent, it is important to raise questions about whether it always and automatically has a beneficial effect. Do surrogate families have as beneficial an effect when they cater for upwards of a hundred children rather than only two or three? What is the optimal staff–child ratio? What range of professional skills are best? Is part-time support more effective than full-time care, or vice versa? Whilst the literature is important in drawing attention to the different ways in which children are catered for, there seem to be so many unanswered questions, that a more careful and fine-grained description of patterns of care seems necessary before accepting some of the more sweeping generalisations to be found in the literature.

This raises another important issue about the generality of findings found in much of the literature reviewed in this chapter. Previously, conclusions about the negative impact of being left behind have depended on studies establishing a comparison between two main groups of children: those left behind, and those not left behind (that is, living in “intact” families). To this a third group is now added, those left behind, but being looked after by various forms of professional surrogate care. The fact that this third category must now be added, is because patterns of care for the children of migrant workers has

been changing and will continue to change. This suggests that both the type of analysis being conducted and the perspective adopted in the study of “left behind children” must change; because the analysis is not adequate to compare the three groups. This is because patterns of care have been shown to be dynamic and have changed over time. Within these changes, left-behind children have often experienced more than one type of care, as the opportunity structures of care have changed for their parents. Some forms of professional surrogate care may indeed provide improvements in well-being, but that might be because it is seen as an improvement on the arrangements prior to being moved into a surrogate family, for instance. But this also serves to emphasise the importance of a whole new perspective on looked after children, treating the whole process of being left behind as a dynamic process, subject to change and re-negotiation between parents, children and carers. This is the perspective which is emphasised and illustrated throughout this thesis. The analysis will therefore focus on changes in patterns of care through time (diachronically) not simply the comparison of care regimes synchronically.

To make the perspective being adopted clear we lay out a set of research aims to be explored within the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Research aims arising out of the literature review:

1. To understand why parents choose to leave their children at their home village or send them to local town.
2. To examine the factors that appear important in choosing a particular form of arrangements for the guardianship of their child.
3. To explore how parents continue to monitor the well-being of their children.
4. To examine the factors that seem to be important for parents when evaluating the arrangements for their children.
5. To understand how and why parents change the care arrangements for

their children.

6. To explore how left-behind children respond to their parents working away and how does this change over time.
7. To examine the impact of their parents' migration on the children and how they change over time from different people's points of view.
8. To explore how left-behind children influence social groups other than themselves and their parents.

Chapter 2 Methodology

Introduction

The overall aim of this study is to make a unique contribution to existing knowledge on left-behind children in rural China and to do so by exploring various aspects of their experiences. This chapter is going to describe the nature of the research and discuss its methodology.

The nature of the research aims can help to determine which research methods are most appropriate. The aims and strategy adopted in this research came, in part, from a review of previous research in the area, including how the research was conducted. This is followed by an exploration of the research approach chosen for this study, the location of the research, the participants selected to be interviewed, the data collection process and concerns about children at risk. It also describes how the data was analysed and reflects on the whole research enterprise.

Previous Studies

Most of the work to date concerning the left-behind children in rural China has been conducted using quantitative research methods often based on large-scale surveys administering fixed-response-type questionnaires or interview schedules. This focus has had three major consequences. Firstly, given the method of data collection, it is difficult to explore any in-depth hidden

issues not identified by the fixed question and answer format. Secondly, the data collected by questionnaires can only be analysed by describing distributions of the types of answers given and potential statistical links between types of answers. Thirdly, and as a consequence of this, the impact of the parents' migration is frozen in time, whereas in reality, the impact might change over several years and therefore the picture presented is over-simplified. Conclusions were reached based on an 'average', rather than complexities being explored (Lin, 2003; Sun, 2005; Ye & Murray, 2005; Zhou & Qing, 2007).

An example of this can be seen in the research of the *Caring for the Next Generation Committee* (2005) in Si Chuan Province. Questionnaires were sent to 600 children in 10 towns asking questions, which when the results were aggregated, would give estimates of the proportion of left-behind children in these locations, their age distribution, and their guardianship types. The questions asked also sought to explore whether there were any perceived problems among the left-behind children. Similarly, the *Women's Federation* in Linshu City investigated 200 left-behind children in 10 counties (Chen, 2001). Their main findings indicated the types and percentages of guardianship and some of the impacts of their parents' migration on the children

A variation in the methods used can be found in Ye and Murray (2005) and Lv (2007), which both employed semi-structured interviews to collect the data. However, the unequal power relationships between researcher and researched is not changed by the use of these methods and the left-behind children who were interviewed in the research are still considered as passive rather than active agents, mediating the processes through which their parents' absence had an impact on their own behaviours.

Ye and Murray (2005), the most significant research on left-behind children to

date, was carried out in 10 villages in north west China. Questionnaires were used as the dominant method of collecting data. The selected left-behind children and not-left-behind children were investigated through self-administered questionnaires. The guardians were interviewed based on a semi-structured questionnaire. The questions covered several issues: daily life, educational performance, psychology and the emotional sphere, and other factors in the environment. They concluded that the impact of the parents' absence on the left-behind children was largely negative, including heavy housework, poor school performance and loneliness

Lv (2007) interviewed 89 left-behind children in rural areas and 61 adults who worked in Beijing who had left children behind in their hometowns. His study suggested that being left behind is a complex process which is characterised by the 'dynamic of being left behind'. For instance, left-behind children were not always left by their parents for the duration of their migration; some children spent some time living with their migrant parents. Lv also drew attention to 'mutual guardianship' (some left-behind children look after their guardians as well, thus acting in the role of 'young carers'), and also 'unsteady and indeterminate guardianship' (where the responsibilities of the guardian were unclear and changing (2007, p.98-99).

It is argued by many researchers that the labour migration of parents has an impact on many aspects of childhood, including: children's education (Fang & Sang, 2005; Xiong, 2006; Ye & Murray, 2005); children's social relationships (Fang & Sang, 2005; Ye, 2005;); children's behaviour (Fang & Sang, 2005; Ye & Murray, 2005); and, children's mental health (Cao, 2007; Fang & Sang, 2005; Ye & Murray, 2005). Many of these studies also seem to assume that this impact is automatic (or passive) and not mediated through the active involvement of mothers, fathers, grandparents and children in the development of interactive family relationships. However, Yang (2004) is an exception in

providing counter-intuitive findings about the impact of migration. She found that the school performance of some left-behind children improved after their parents' migration. The reason for this improvement is attributed to recognition by the children of the sacrifices made by their hard-working parents; a recognition which led them in turn to respond with hard work at school.

However, such findings are rare, and the majority of studies conclude by implying that being left behind does have a deleterious effect upon children's education, through, for instance, poorer supervision at home and poor communication between guardians and school teachers, even though these processes are not directly scrutinised within the research. Even the most notable research (Ye & Murray, 2005) does not directly explore how any other effects, apart from those it took for granted it would find, had a bearing on the lives of the left-behind children.

This research aims to contribute to the body of knowledge by investigating left-behind children in the deeper context, where the parents' absence affects the child, and through an examination of the reaction of children and others and their reflections on the changed circumstances and its impact.

Research Approach

The advantages and disadvantages of using both qualitative and quantitative research methods have been discussed widely in the literature (for instance, Bryman, 2004; Gilbert, 2008). The qualitative approach has been criticised for "being too subjective", "being difficult to replicate", "problems of generalisation" and "lack of transparency" (Bryman, 2004, p.284). The criticisms of quantitative research were focused on the "researchers' failure to distinguish people and social institution from the world of nature", "an artificial and spurious sense of

precision and accuracy”, “the reliance on instruments and procures which hinders the connection between research and everyday life”, and the unequal power relationship between the researchers and the researched (Bryman, 2004, p.78; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). It is now much more usual than in the 1970s and 80s to find authors in agreement that no single strategy is suitable for all circumstances and that the research questions and research aims place a range of demands on the research design (Bryman, 2004; Gilbert, 2008). As this research aims to study the experiences, attitudes and expectations of the targeted groups, and to explore and obtain an in-depth understanding of the worlds of the described groups, the research has been designed predominately as an exploratory qualitative study. It is hoped that this research will “yield insights and in-depth understanding” via information from rich case studies (Patton, 2002, p.230). In other words, “elicit the contextualised nature of experience and action, and attempts to generate analyses that are detailed, ‘thick’, and integrative.”(ibid.). This approach offers the researcher a chance to explore in detail precisely what goes on in the setting being researched and detailed information about the social world, in order to make sense of particular behaviours and subjects’ responses to these (Bryman, 2004). In addition, qualitative research does not view the social world as frozen, but rather as fluid and amenable to exploration as an emergent process. Bryman (2004) points out that:

“This tendency reveals itself in a number of different ways. One of the main ways is that there is often a concern to show how events and patterns unfold over time. As a result, qualitative evidence often conveys a strong sense of change and flux.”

(Bryman, 2004, p.281)

Furthermore, some scholars argue that qualitative methods are especially suitable for researching vulnerable people. In conducting research with

children who are in the 'vulnerable' category, it must be recognised that this included left-behind children who "may experience real or potential harm and require special safeguards to ensure that their welfare and rights are protected" (Stone, 2003 quoted in Liangputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p.204). "Extreme sensitivity" (ibid.) must be invested; therefore, in a study with vulnerable groups, direct contact with them and deep understanding of them is only possible by using qualitative methods, especially where sensitive and difficult topics are raised.

Taking this into consideration, a qualitative research approach seems appropriate for researching the vulnerable young people. Firstly, as Campbell noted, by using qualitative research methods, the researchers are able to get access to the respondents' life stories and gain rich and potentially complex data (2002, quoted in Liangputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p.205). The stories told through employing such methods also provide researchers with a "window into lives that might be very different from their own" (Warr 2004, quoted in Liangputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p.205). Secondly, the necessary direct contact and close involvement between the researcher and the people being studied serve to assist the researcher's understanding of the world in their own eyes as described by the respondents (Bryman, 2004). Thirdly, as Liangputtong and Ezzy advocate, the flexibility and fluidity of qualitative research methods "are appropriate for researching the 'vulnerable'" (2005, p.204). According to the informants' responses and the social settings, the researcher is able to vary the questions and strategies or even terminate the data collecting process should this be deemed necessary. This may indeed occur, as it is crucial that when conducting research with vulnerable groups it must be ensured that the research process does not cause harm to the groups involved in the research. To avoid any harm to the informants, the researcher sometimes has to change direction in the course of the investigation. Therefore the "unstructured nature of qualitative research offers the prospect of flexibility" (Bryman, 2004, p.282).

Whilst the predominant methods employed in this research were qualitative, it was thought important also to collect some basic data using a quantitative approach, as this was only a small scale survey with the intention of exploring whether the more detailed case studies were typical of the experiences of a wider group of children.

This research aimed to get a rounded picture of the life of the left-behind children and explore their experiences, expectations and understanding of the world. Therefore, both a quantitative and qualitative approach was used. Structured interviews, in-depth interviews and case studies with a longitudinal perspective were employed as the main strategies to collect data, with particular aims and objectives assigned to each method. The in-depth interviews facilitated the respondents' disclosure of their views of their own lives, in their own terms and assisted in the understanding of the general types of experience, common to many left-behind children. The case studies were designed to give a more rounded picture of the life of the chosen respondents. They cast more light on the impact of the parents' labour migration and explore the dynamics of how children are being left behind. The case studies not only explored these issues through the responses of the child, but also by interviewing other key actors in the unfolding biographies, including their guardians, teachers and classmates.

Meanwhile other approaches were used to fulfil the wider aims of the research. Documents such as letters written to, and from, parents, and scrapbooks made by children were also collected and used as supplementary data which might facilitate children to reveal aspects of their lives, and provide a concrete basis of discussion with the children of the complex feelings and emotions associated with being left behind. This combination of visual and oral data was important as an aid to the researcher's understanding.

The research is divided into two related parts. The first part contains primarily structured interviews concerning the children's demographic details and variables to measure their experiences at home, in school and in the community. The second consists of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, visual methods, qualitative longitudinal methods and case studies with different groups of children, to explore their experiences of being left-behind and their understanding of the world.

The structured interviews employed in the research not only provide a general idea of their life but also act as a warm-up exercise for both the researcher and the informants. The questions were designed to be easy to answer and not likely to be interpreted as prying into sensitive areas

Methods: Data Collection

Recruitment

Both left-behind children and not-left-behind children approached in the classes were informed of the research aims. These were stated as being to explore the experiences, feelings and perceptions of the left-behind children and to find a robust way to support those children and families. This followed an introduction to the researcher given to every potential respondent (both left-behind children and not-left-behind children in 3 schools) by the class teachers and/or the researcher herself. Secondly, the researcher informed the children about the nature of the research, including the main research topic, the research questions and the research methods. Thirdly, a brief summary was given (both in writing and verbally) of the kind of questions that would be

asked, as well as a reassurance of the confidentiality of the data collected.

Children were first informed about the research through school channels, by being given a research briefing sheet. The researcher was also given the opportunity by the school to address all the potential participants on the nature of the research being undertaken. Following this, letters detailing the study were taken home to their guardians by the children. This gave the parent or guardian the opportunity to opt their child out of participation. Those students who were followed-up with a structured interview were given a further consent form to sign. This was confirmed at the beginning of the interview, where the first question asked them to confirm they had read and understood the briefing form and signed the consent form.

Those students chosen for the in-depth interview and case study were approached with a basic outline to confirm their interest and opt-in consent from parents was then sought by letter. At the interview itself a full verbal explanation was given to students and they were asked to sign the consent form at the beginning of every interview. Adult participants were contacted using a covering letter with the briefing sheet summarising the nature of the study. Again, they were verbally given more details of the research at the interview and asked to sign a statement of consent.

All the adults were informed that the study aimed to help future parents, temporary guardians and teachers know more about the left-behind children and find a cooperative way to minimise the impact of their parents' absence.

Location of the Research

As discussed in the literature review, geographical differences lead to significantly different circumstances which can influence the entire research process and the conclusion. However, two factors were taken into account when the researcher chose the research area: firstly, the field should be geographically suitable in terms of the likelihood of parents being a considerable distance from the main areas of economic expansion, the social-economic situation of the communities and known to contain a significant number of left-behind children. Secondly, it should also be easy to get access to the targeted groups; therefore inevitably this meant the selection of samples of convenience. Thus, the research was located in two villages and one town near the researcher's parents' home in Inner Mongolia.

The first school from which research participants were recruited is located in a village and named as Herb Village by the researcher because the main crops planted are herbs. The distance from Herb Village to the centre of population is 15km and 30km to the nearest city. Villagers can go to the city by bus that runs twice a day. Taxis are also available but these would cost around 20 Yuan. According to the statistics in 2007, Herb Village has a population of 2406 (1,267 males and 1,239 females) 94% of whom are identified as being of Han Nationality with the remaining 6% being of Mongolian Nationality. The labour force is just over a thousand workers (1003) of which, 510 are males and 493 females. The net income per capital in 2007 in this village was 700 Yuan per annum. However, more than 30% of general village income (1,750,000 Yuan) came from the earnings of migrant workers (654,000 Yuan). Long-term labour migration is 200 "man days", involving 110 males and 90 females; seasonal labour migration accounts for 260 "man days", with 140 males and 120 females. Most migrant workers migrate to Bei Jing, Tian Jin, He Bei etc, and are

employed in simple manufacturing, constructing and catering work. They return home only during Chinese New Year as their place of work is more than 500km away, with the journey taking over 12 hours and costing hundreds Yuan. The child population of Herb Village is 560 with a male-female sex ratio of 6:5. Of these, 202 children are left-behind children. The left-behind sex ratio is very similar to the overall child population. Of the whole child population there are 140 children of primary school age (7-13 years of age) who attend Herb Village Primary School. Of these 35 are left-behind children. Children then have to travel to the nearby town to get access to schooling after the age of 13 years of age (higher education).

The second school from which research participants were recruited is located in a village as well and named as Sideline Village by the researcher. This is because less than 20% labour forces are engaged in agricultural work. The distance from Sideline Village to the main town is 10km. This village also has a convenient transportation system with which villagers can go to the town by bus that departs every 30 minutes from 7am to 8pm. According to the statistics in 2007, Sideline Village has a population of 1789, with 895 males and 894 females. The large majority (80%) are identified as Han Nationality, 14% are Mongolian, and 6% of them are of Man Nationality. The labour force is 605, (305 males and 300 females). The net income per capital in 2007 in this village was 750 Yuan. In terms of general village income, 520,000 Yuan came from migrant labour, much more than the 380,000 Yuan from agriculture, 200,000 Yuan from livestock farming and 150,000 Yuan from commercial businesses (including service and transportation). Long-term labour migration accounts for 200 “man days”, involving 110 males and 90 females. Taking into account seasonal labour, the contribution of migrant work accounts for 226 “man days”, involving 114 males and 112 females. The destinations of migrant workers seeking work are mainly to Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning. Most are employed in simple manufacturing, constructing and catering work. They return

home only during Chinese New Year as their work is more than 600km away from home, the journey taking over 12 hours by coach or by train. The child population of Sideline Village is 450 with approximately the same number of boys and girls. There are 196 left-behind children with the same sex ratio. There are 113 children aged 7-13 years of age (including 30 left-behind children) who attend the only school (Sideline Village Primary School) in the village however 5 left-behind children are sent to primary schools in the town.

The third school from which research participants were recruited is located in main town of the county. This is also surrounded by 4 villages. There are about 2000 children in this school and 129 of them are left-behind children. However, most of the left-behind children came from the villages and their parents migrated to the similar destinations as the migrants from Sideline Village.

These research sites met with the two requirements outlined above. Firstly, there were hundreds of left-behind children in the 3 communities used. Secondly, the communities had different types of schools which both left-behind children and not-left-behind children attended. The first school was in a remote village in which most of the villagers were living only on agricultural incomes. The second was located 10 miles away from the town centre, which meant that parents could avail themselves of a wider range of jobs, and consequently had a wider range of incomes. The third school was located in the town centre. Left-behind children in this school had not necessarily been left behind in their hometown. To gain a better education their parents may have sent them to the nearest town before they made their labour migration to a larger city. Thirdly, the researcher had some relatives who were teachers in all the 3 schools which also helped facilitate access. It is likely that the family connections helped the researcher's credibility and trust within the school and the community, which are paramount in studying such issues in rural China (Chong, 2006). In addition, this helped to reduce research costs, and provided

more insights into the three communities.

Sampling

The data collection process was planned to take place in three phases and initially took place in the setting of a school where the researcher took on the role of a volunteer classroom assistant. Access to the school had already been negotiated and agreed through the head of the school. Playing the role of a participant observer before carrying out other aspects of data collection had its value. Firstly, the researcher was able to get more information about the context in which the fieldwork was located which was not available through any other means. School teachers were able to provide the researcher with records of the children's school performance, family information and even aspects of their behaviours which may have been of concern. But they were not able to provide details of any sub-culture of relationships with others (such as classmates, siblings etc) around them. This could, however, be observed through observation of the children at play at school, in the village and around the community.

Secondly, involvement in and observation of classes, break-time and after-school activities could reduce the stress on the potential research participants, as a relationship of trust had been built up before starting the interviews with the children.

Initially, the researcher planned to undertake sampling in only one school. However, more stories about left-behind children came to her ears, however, from her own relatives who lived in another countryside location. This also suggested that using more than one school would yield different types of left-behind children in terms of their guardianships and migration patterns. This

will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

A purposive sample of respondents was planned for the data collection. Five groups of stakeholders: children, guardians, parents, teachers and other people from two villages and a town in Inner Mongolia, were involved. The inclusion of a diversity of people was specifically structured to allow for comparison and contrast, and to observe patterns, trends and key themes, in order to provide a complete picture of the experience of left-behind children of migration and the impact of it on them. The merit of a design that used multiple participants at each site is that it allows the triangulation of findings across sources and tests issues of reliability and validity (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Information collected from different groups also contributes to the understanding of the different perspectives of left-behind children, as well as the impact of labour migration on others concerning the left-behind children.

Children

Left-behind children were the key actors, as the research aimed to understand their frames of reference. Nevertheless, not-left-behind children (living with one or both parents) were also involved. There are several reasons to include not-left-behind children in the research. The first is to make comparisons and contrasts concerning the various aspects of well-being between children from different family structures.. The second is to recognize that the status of being left-behind or not-left-behind fluctuates over time. Left-behind children might become not-left-behind children, and not-left-behind children might be left by both parents. As the changes took place whilst the research was in process new patterns and themes emerged through analysing the new context.

Thirty five left-behind children and the same number of not-left-behind children were involved in the basic questionnaire-based survey. The sample was further balanced for two key variables, age and school performance. Two main

age groups were involved, children aged '7-10' years and '11-13' years.. School performance was defined as 'above average' and 'average and below average'. For the more in-depth qualitative study, the total number of research participants was reduced further by sub-sampling. In all, 12 left-behind children and 4 not-left-behind children took part in the second stage of fieldwork representing five main analytic cohorts (see Appendices 1-3). These cohorts included: 3 groups of left-behind children according to type of guardianship; and two groups defined as not left behind children, those with intact families and a small number living with lone parents. At phase 3, 12 left-behind children and one not left-behind child (albeit one looked after by one parent) were included for in-depth examination. The subgroups were also balanced for school performance and location (see Appendix 4). Four "case studies" were also examined in depth with these being chosen because of their experience of four different types of guardianship and a change of guardianship during the course of the research. The process will be demonstrated in following tables.

Guardians, parents and teachers

Twelve guardians, 13 parents and 5 teachers were recruited. The rationales for including the left-behind children's guardians, parents and teachers were multifold. Firstly, it was to facilitate understanding of children's experiences of being left-behind. Secondly, it was to capture a diverse range of experiences and perceptions as well as the impact of labour migration on children's well-being. Thirdly, the research aimed to explore different perspectives within and between these groups, in order to include different influences and different experiences of different family structures (types of guardianship). An investigation into the adults' views would fill in the information gaps of the children's experiences in the family and school, and help understand their experiences of caring for and teaching the left-behind children. Finally, exploring their experiences and perspectives will help to understand the impacts of rural labour migration on family, school, community and other

related social institutions.

Research Process

This research has involved the use of a range of different methods, employed over a period of three years, on different sample populations. The following chart summarises some of the main elements involved in this. As can be seen from the chart, there were three main stages during which data collection took place; the first in April to June 2008, the second between January and March in 2009, and finally in February 2010. Each of the main stages of data collection will now be considered in turn together with the different methods which were used at each stage. As can also be seen from this chart, the overall design of the research was also intended to maximise some of the advantages to be gained from the use of longitudinal qualitative methods (LQM) which will also be discussed in the following sections.

Stage	Left behind children	Not-left behind children
Stage one <i>(April-June 2008)</i>	<i>a) Structured Interviews</i> 35 children – under 13 Mainly over the age of 9 Mixture of abilities <i>b) Semi-structured Interviews (1)</i> 12 children: 6 with grandparents 4 with teacher/carers 2 with other carer 6 F 6 M	<i>a) Structured Interviews</i> 35 children – all under 13 Mainly over the age of 9 Mixture of abilities <i>a) Semi-structured Interviews (1)</i> 4 children: 2 with both parents 2 with 1 parent migrated 2 F 2 M

Stage two <i>(Jan-March 2009)</i>	<p>a) <i>Semi-structured Interviews (1)</i></p> <p>12 children:</p> <p>5 with grandparents</p> <p>5 with teacher/carer</p> <p>2 with other carer</p> <p>7 F</p> <p>5 M</p> <p>b) <i>Visual Methodologies</i></p> <p>Cameras,</p> <p>Scrapbooks</p> <p>Stickers, glue and pencils</p> <p>8 children:</p> <p><u>(see page 79 for explanation)</u></p> <p>4 with grandparents</p> <p>3 with teacher/carer</p> <p>1 with other carer</p> <p>4 F</p> <p>4 F</p>	<p>a) <i>Semi-structured interviews (1)</i></p> <p>4 children:</p> <p>2 with both parents</p> <p>2 with 1 parent migrated</p> <p>1 F</p> <p>3 M</p> <p>a) <i>Visual Methodologies</i></p> <p>4 children:</p> <p><u>(see page 79 for explanation)</u></p> <p>2 with both parents</p> <p>2 with 1 parent migrated</p> <p>1 F</p> <p>3 M</p>
Stage three <i>(Feb 2010)</i>	<p><i>Semi-structured interviews (2)</i></p> <p>12 children:</p> <p>5 with grandparents</p> <p>6 with teacher/carer</p> <p>1 with other carer</p> <p>6 F</p> <p>6 M</p>	<p><i>Semi-structured Interviews (2)</i></p> <p>1 children:</p> <p>1 M with 1 parent migrated</p>

Table 2.1 Sample and methods used in each stage

Stage one

This simple survey was designed to explore a preliminary comparison between left behind children and their peers who are still living with their parents in order to get a comparative view of differences between left-behind children and not-left-behind children. It was carried out from April-June 2008. This first Phase of sampling included both left-behind children (“LBC”) and not-left-behind-children (“NLBC”) (although this latter category including those living with either both parents or with only one biological parent).

Phase 1

This was done through carrying out structured interviews (based around an administered questionnaire) (see Appendix 5) with 35 left-behind children and 35 not-left-behind children. Within these two main groupings, an attempt was also made through purposive sampling to recruit respondents from a wide range of educational ability (both above and below average performance) as indicated by their class teacher. According to their domestic situation (where both parents had left the village, where one parent had left, or where neither of the parents had left) three different questionnaires were employed. The questions contained within all three aimed to generate information about their family life, as well as life at school and in the community. Each questionnaire consisted of 30-50 closed questions which covered 5 main issues, including:

- general life (daily routines, activities and responsibility;
- social relationships (who they see on a regular basis as part of these routines, including patterns of friendship with their peer;
- education(attendance at and performance at school);
- access to resources (such as pocket money); and
- their feelings about their circumstances and prospects.

The questions were as simple as possible with clear, structured and mutually exclusive responses offered. For instance:

How much is your pocket money every week?

- ☐ Less than 1 Yuan
- ☐ More than 1 Yuan to 3 Yuan
- ☐ More than 3 Yuan to 10 Yuan
- ☐ More than 10 Yuan

For the most part, the researcher had only to tick the appropriate boxes which fitted the informant's reply. Some more open-ended questions were also included such as

What do you do when you are having difficulties with your studies?

- ☐ Turn to the teacher
- ☐ Turn to classmates
- ☐ Turn to my mother
- ☐ Turn to my father
- ☐ Try to solve things by myself
- ☐ Other

Here the researcher had to take fuller notes of the responses given verbatim and take note of the answers to the open questions. All the interviews were recorded.

Initially, the research was designed to interview 60 children in total. However, the design was modified during the first phase of fieldwork. Due to some recorded face-to-face interviews being contaminated by outside noise; therefore, a total of 70 children were interviewed. The sample in the 7-10 age group did not increase, and 90% of the participants in the research were older than 9, as can be seen in Table 2.2.

Children under the age of 9 found it difficult to understand the questions, even with the support of the interviewer. For instance, the question "Have you ever

experienced problems in completing your studies?” was not clearly understood by the children under 9. Taking that into consideration, during the field work it seemed more sensible to concentrate on the slightly older age group, therefore, a higher proportion of older children got involved in the research. Table 2.2 represents the actual numbers interviewed.

	LBC		NLBC (10 living with one parent and 25 living with both parents)	
	Average and above average	Under average	Average and above average	Under average
7-10	4	4	4	4
11-13	13	14	13	14

Table 2.2 Structured-interview sample by age and school performance

Phase 2

This involved taking a purposive sample of respondents, who agreed and had their guardian’s permission to take part in the further interview. The sample was initially designed to include:

- 10-12 left-behind-children. The group might contain:
 - 5-6 left-behind students with grandparents
 - 5-6 with other type of guardianship
- 4 not-left-behind children-but with one parent working out of the village
- 2 children living with both parents

Following the first stage structured interviews, the sample in the second stage was altered as a result of limited time and resources. Due to having only two months for field work and the children's busy school work and homework schedule, there was no alternative but to reduce the target numbers. Therefore the sample consisted of (see children's information in Appendix 1):

- 12 left-behind children which might contain 6 left-behind students with grandparents and 6 with other type of guardianship. These six with other forms of guardianship included:
 - 4 living with carers/teachers
 - 2 living with other relatives

Of those classified as not-left-behind:

- 2 not-left-behind children were living with one parent with the other parent working out of the village
- 2 children living with both parents.

Furthermore, 12 left-behind children's guardians, teachers and other people were also recruited:

- 10 guardians
 - 6 grandmothers
 - 1 manager of a surrogate family
 - 1 teacher who provide surrogate care
 - 1 left-behind child's uncle
 - 1 left-behind child's aunt
- 5 teachers
- 5 other people

	M	F
Cared for by grandparents	3	3
Cared for by teachers	1	1
Living in surrogate families	1	1
Cared for by others	2	0
Cared for by one or both parents	2	2

Table 2.3: Semi-structured sample by gender and guardianship in Stage one: children

The Use of Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data from the different groups of informants at this stage. For the semi-structured interviews, four different interview schedules (Appendices 6-9) were used for the four groups of actors. Prior to this phase, a rapport had been established between the children and the researcher through participant observation and structured interviews. Questions concerning their experiences of being left behind were not put forward immediately, to avoid pressure on the children. It was important to put the respondents at ease, especially as the focus of the interviews was on events and opinions which could be of a sensitive nature. To make the interviews as unthreatening for the respondents as possible, two strategies were adopted, the use of a familiar venue and warm-up questions. All the interviews with children took place in their schools, including the playground and the video room. The playground was used when other children were in the classroom. As a neutral environment with some stone chairs and tables in the corner, the respondents did not need to sit formally. It was easy to encourage the respondents to relax and share their experiences and perspectives on an equal basis as it was their domain. The video room was equipped with a big screen functioning as a supplement to lessons. Children were not allowed to enter this room without permission, but it was their favourite room in the school,

as they enjoyed watching films and other recordings there. The respondents were asked to choose the seat they wanted and the researcher sat beside them, like a classmate. The location partly eliminated the asymmetrical power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, the adult and the child.

The second strategy was the use of warm-up questions. Each interview started with some simple questions, such as “What do you most like and dislike about this time of the year?” Children therefore felt it easier, safer and more comfortable to move to talking about more sensitive themes, for example “What is the worst thing you have been through?”.

Both left-behind children and not-left-behind children were interviewed using the same topic guide, as the interview was designed to gain as detailed a picture as possible of each respondent’s experiences and perspectives, not just about being left-behind but on the broader issues of family life, school life and personal thoughts (Appendix 6). To reduce the impact of the setting of parent-child separation, the same topics were elicited for all children to talk about. In this sense, the children’s experiences of being left behind were placed within a rich context of their life experiences as they recalled them at the time of the interview. In addition, this also allowed a comparison between different groups to be made.

Three different interview schedules were used for the targeted guardians, teachers and other people (See Appendices 7-9). Twenty interviews took place in the venues they selected, which were their houses, school meeting rooms and a video room.

Stage Two

After getting more information and establishing a relationship of trust with potential respondents, 16 children (including 12 left-behind children and 4 not-left-behind children) were involved in a further exploratory, in-depth case study analysis from January to March in 2009. The information collected at this stage contained a wider array of data, including visual material contained within their scrapbooks, together with their accounts of their life stories related to the items they had (see Appendix 10). The use of visual strategies will be discussed in detail later. Their guardians and parents who returned home for family reunion in Chinese New Year were also interviewed as well (see Appendices 11-12).

It should be addressed that at this stage, one left-behind child's mother planned to remain at home, and one child who lived with her mother was now living with her grandparents as her mother had left to work in the city. Thus, the identities they had been classified with during the first stage were exchanged, with the left-behind child becoming not-left-behind and vice versa. This shift confirmed the appropriateness of the sampling design during the first stage, which included both left-behind children and not-left-behind children. These two cases provided unique evidence of children before being left behind and after. Both of children's parents and guardians/previous guardians were interviewed. And the impact of parents' migration could be explored in a dynamic process. Researcher's understanding of the shift also influenced the administration of the research plan. Of the 12 left-behind children involved in the three stages of the research, 8 (4M and 4Fs) were equipped with scrapbooks and disposable cameras. The remaining 4 were not but were interviewed according to the topic guide (see appendix 10). These latter 4 were not given the scrapbook packages because I only had the resources to afford 12 scrapbooks and cameras. It was further thought important to include some children who were not left-behind children in order to explore the comparison

between the visual artefacts produced by the two groups. The left-behind children's teachers were also interviewed to get a more rounded picture of their life and to facilitate the understanding of the experience and feelings of other members of their social milieu (see Appendix 13).

Thus, the sample based on previous stage in this stage contained:

- 12 left-behind children which contained 5 left-behind students with grandparents and 7 with other type of guardianship. These seven with other forms of guardianship included:
 - 5 living with carers/teachers
 - 2 living with other relatives

Of those classified as not-left-behind:

- 2 not-left-behind children were living with one parent with the other parent working out of the village
- 2 children living with both parents.

Of other people:

- 10 left-behind children's guardians
 - 5 grandmothers
 - 1 manager of a surrogate family
 - 2 teachers who provide surrogate care
 - 1 left-behind child's uncle
 - 1 left-behind child's aunt
- 1 not-left-behind child's grandmother
- 10 left-behind children's parents
- 1 not-left-behind child's mother
- 5 teachers

	M	F
Cared for by grandparents	2(2)	3(2)
Cared for by teachers	1(0)	1(1)
Living in surrogate families	1(1)	2(1)
Cared for by others	2(1)	0
Cared for by one or both parents	3(3)	1(1)

Table 2.4: Semi-structured sample by gender and guardianship in Stage two: children

※The number in brackets indicates how many children were provided with scrapbook packages.

The use of visual methodologies

The use of visual media as a tool to produce information about the topics of inquiry is grounded in both the value of this method and the nature of the research, and the particular suitability of these methods in research with children (Burke, 2008; Leith, 2008; Johnson, 2008).

Firstly, the visual imagery produced by participants can become a new and different source of data in its own right (Johnson, 2008; Thomson, 2008). Every image is generated through the “practices of selection, processing and editing with a very self-critical and reflexive disposition” (Thomson, 2008, p.10). The socially constructed image can represent the producers’ identity, their location, their preferences, their expectations and values, their living situation and their social status. Children’s photographs and other artwork can represent their everyday experiences and perception of aspects of their life and provide their expectation of their future (Burke, 2008; Leith, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Kaplan, 2008).

Secondly, this tool makes it possible for most people to tell their story,

especially vulnerable research participants. Bendelow used visual research methods to offer respondents an “appropriate” approach to talk about their sensitive and private experiences openly (1993, quoted in Liamputtong, 2007, p.141). Johnson argued that the use of visual imagery enabled the young participants to “have a say, to reflect on their daily lives, identify issues of concern and to make informed judgments” (2008, p.81). Using such methods, children felt much safer talking about their ideas. The photographs and others artwork could work as a “safe container”, with children able to express difficult and ambiguous feelings freely “without fear of judgement” (Leitch, 2008, p.45).

Thirdly, the use of visual media “gives voice to the researched” (Liamputtong, 2007, p.148). A number of researchers have discussed the imbalance of power relations between researchers and the researched (Best, 2007; Bourdeau, 2000; Kaplan, 2008). Kaplan (2008) argues that power imbalances can generate potential pressure on the participants to say particular things and second-guessing through them being led by the researcher into avenues of expression not of their own choosing. The use of visual representations provides children with an opportunity to understand the information and give them more control over the research processes (Johnson, 2008). The approach of asking children to ‘make’ their photographs and to select and order them for discussion serves to counteract the traditional asymmetrical power relationship and leads to “promoting children as co-researchers rather than simply participants in the research” (Johnson, 2008, p.81). Thus, more (and more open-ended) information would be generated, as children are engaged in a fuller, more proactive and more responsible research process (Burke, 2008; Leith, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Kaplan, 2008).

Fourthly, the use of visual methods provides the researcher with a different way of looking at the children. Not only are they creators of their own artistic work, but the children are also the creators of their own culture and their

community (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Proud, 2002). In this way, children can be encouraged to shape, as well as be shaped by, the various settings of their lives.

Finally, Leitch (2008) found that children got more fun and success from the visual images they produced and they provided an atmosphere of trust, respect and relaxation within the research process. The making of the scrapbook, which will be interpreted in the following paragraph, played an important active and interactive role in the research process.

Visual methodologies were not employed equally during the different phases of data collection. Indeed, much of the appreciation of the value of these methods was acquired between the first and second stages. Having said that, it was appreciated from the outset that in order to develop a relationship of trust with respondents, some sort of warm-up exercises needed to be employed. In particular, drawings stimulated the expression of the things they most eagerly wanted to do with their parents and indicated more feelings of emotion than could be conveyed by mere words alone. In the first stage of this study, a classroom of students were asked to draw the thing they most eagerly wanted to do with their parents, and the words they would most want to say to their parents. After they handed in the drawings and paper, the researcher read out the sentences and described the drawings one by one. One of the drawings depicted the child and his parents hand-in-hand with Tiananmen Square in the background. Another image illustrated expectations of all the family members getting together and living a very happy life. These images told the researcher more about what the left-behind children and not-left-behind children perceived as most important and interesting.

Visual methods, drawing methods in particular, are widely used in research with children “who are unable to easily express their emotions and feelings” in

words alone (Liamputtong, 2007, p.148). This has a lot of resonance with the research reported on in this thesis. Children, who could easily feel nervous or bored by verbal questions alone, were invigorated by the process of including visual methods. In the last stage of the research, 12 respondents who were interviewed in the first stage, including 8 left-behind children and 4 not-left-behind children, were provided with a scrapbook package 1 week before their winter holiday. Disposable cameras, stickers, glues, scissors, etc were offered as well. The researcher explained that all these things belonged to them, but she would like to take photographs of each page of the scrapbooks with their permission. Simple instructions were stuck on the first page of the scrapbooks in a child-friendly way, which meant the construction of the scrapbook was made as simple and interesting as possible. The briefing list included:

Not boring, not difficult, not idle, you can have a meaningful and funny winter holiday with me. This is my life! Come on, just do it!

You will see that I included a scrapbook, a disposable camera, some stickers, glue, scissors etc in your package. You can use these things to 'decorate your scrapbook'- your life 'record'. Anything (important, special, funny or even bad) you feel like to share with me can be put in to this memory book. This piece of 'art' will be yours to keep but if it is ok with you I would like to take photo of each page.

In your book you could do any combination of the following:

(for left-behind children)

- before your parents' migration
- after your parents' migration
- now (winter holiday particularly Chinese New Year period)

- 3 years after this Chinese New Year

(for not-left-behind children)

- before the winter holiday
- now (winter holiday particularly Chinese New Year period)
- 3 years after this Chinese New Year.”

You can:

- Write (diary, poems, essays, song lyrics etc)
- Stick in cuttings (from books, magazines, newspapers)
- Stick in photo (from your family albums, photos you take in Chinese New Year)
- Stick in tickets or other things that you collected over time
- Draw (drawings you have done or received from other people)
- Do craftwork (cards, paper folding as appendix attached to the whole set)

I would like to go through your scrapbook with you when you are back school, but you can contact with me if you have any inquiry.

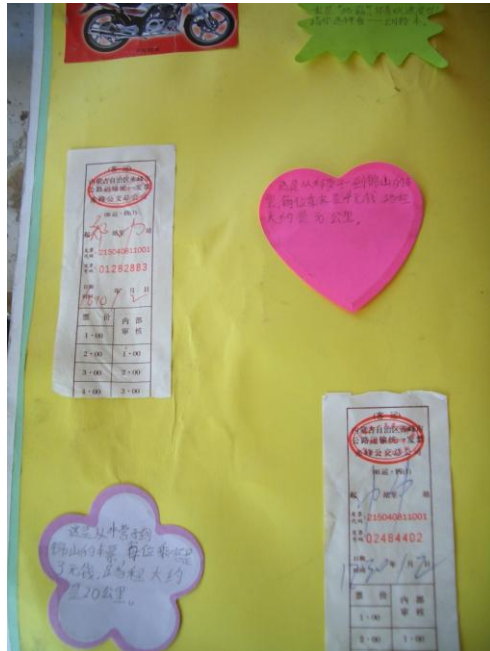
With the disposable camera, the respondents were asked to use up the film taking photographs of anything that they felt was important or interesting about their lives during the winter holidays. The children then returned the camera to the researcher with the consent form when they went back to school. The researcher processed the film and returned the photographs to the respondents who were asked to stick 10 of the pictures into their scrapbooks with simple descriptions. After the interviews, the respondents' permission was sought to keep a copy of the complete scrapbooks as part of the project data.

The scrapbooks were used to discuss their life experiences in the subsequent in-depth interview. At this interview, each child was asked about why they had chosen those photos or cuttings, the meanings of their drawings and what their thoughts were at that time. This procedure provided the researcher with both visual and literal data, in order to have a deeper understanding of the life that the left-behind children led. For instance, the implication, presentation, involvement and absence of their parents in the scrapbooks could be interpreted in a variety of ways. It also served the goal of the research to explore the impact of parents' migration on the children's life from a longitudinal perspective.

One left-behind girl attached a mini calendar covering the period she was left-behind. She marked some dates with coloured pens. She explained the meaning for those days. So, for instance, 8th August 2008 was the opening day of the Olympic Games. The opening ceremony was held in the building which her father had helped to build. She hopes she can visit it in the future. In addition to this, her birthday was marked as well. However, sadly nobody celebrated it since her guardians did not know when it was.

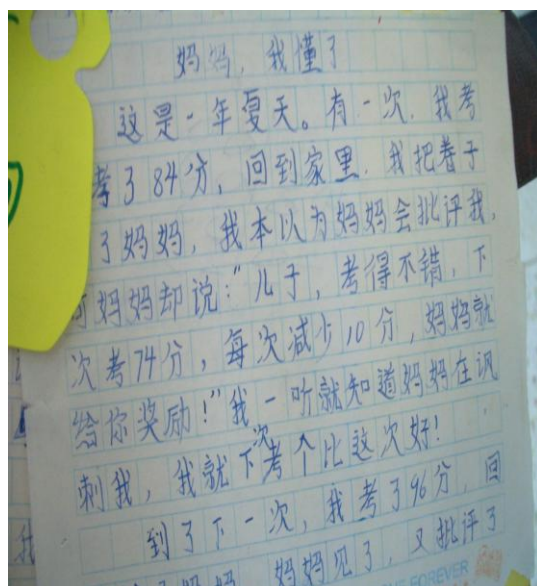


Another left-behind girl kept some bus tickets used by her parents when they took the bus to the host city. She received many gifts from her parents but still cherished the tickets, which seemed to be a symbol of her parents' migration.



Both the calendar with marked dates and the tickets could be regarded as a link connecting parents and children. They had complex feelings about their parents' migration. On one hand, their migration not only makes a contribution to the development of the city, but also brings new things to their family. On the other hand, their migration leads to the absence of caring and closeness.

A scrapbook created by a boy who had been left behind for several years included a hand-written essay with the teacher's mark and comments. The title of this composition was "My Mum" depicting how his mother supervised his study before she went to the city. A strict but amiable mother was strongly missed by her son who was now living with his teacher. The mother's image remained as she was at home but not as a visitor.



One left-behind boy's father had assisted him with the scrapbook by drawing a tiger, to symbolise the year in which he was born, alongside his self-introduction. When his father did not return home the following Chinese New Year (the final research stage, during February 2010) because of the divorce from the boy's mother, the family's calamity escalated. When asked about his father, the boy was no longer proud of him. Rather he had a sense of both embarrassment and sadness. The picture provides a stark contrast between the happiness associated with Chinese New Year (and the boy's memory of his father's drawing), and this New Year when his father was absent. Without the scrapbook, the researcher would not have been able to understand or explore his experience

Parents did not always appear in the scrapbooks or in the pictures the children took. One boy who did not do the scrapbook, took photographs and reported that his parents were too busy playing majhong (a Chinese game with small tiles),. Because of this, he explained, they did not have time to get involved in his 'homework'. Thus, he only took photos of his friends. The absence of parents in his visual record did not result from unavailability due to a long distance between them but also from their refusal to engage with the child.



Four of all the 12 left-behind children involved in the entire research process were not equipped with scrapbooks and disposal camera. They were merely interviewed according to the topic guide (see Appendix 10). Without a highly effective ice-breaker and a very powerful tool to elicit their talking, most of them restricted their answers with short sentences. Thus, their experiences turned to be more indirect experiences narrated by their guardians or teachers and much less personal accounts. From a researcher's point of view, the use of images helped a great deal in retaining memory of those parts of the interview which do not appear on tape. One of the scrapbooks interview appears in my field notes as follows:

“Cheng only took pictures of his friends. They were laughing, jumping and eating. He introduced them to me one by one with a happy and satisfied expression. When I mentioned his parents the expression disappeared and [was replaced with] a disappointed face.”

When reading back the transcripts and coding them alongside the field notes, the photographs were once again useful in adding context and a sense of

reality to the data. The scrapbooks also served as a topic guide to the final stage research according to different experiences and themes. Questions were not asked in isolation, but explored within the context and background the respondents had already shared. This helped to build rapport with the respondents, and to situate their responses within the stories they had offered.

Although the instructions were listed on the front page and an example scrapbook was shown to the children, the researcher also rang them to make certain they were fine with the disposable camera. However, there were children who did not do anything with the scrapbook or reported losing them. No respondent arranged their work according to the timeline on the instructions (before parents' migration, after parents' migration). They decorated their scrapbooks as they wanted. The researcher needed to clarify which parts belonged to which part of their life. Sometimes the boundary was not clear, even for the respondents, which made the process of analysis more complicated.

In addition to this, although rich data was produced by using visual methods, placing a camera in the hands of the children was not without challenge. It is of great importance to work out how the children can control the cameras for a month or even a week and keep the camera use as personal only to them, preventing its use by parents, friends and siblings at home, and classmates and teachers in school. The researcher highlighted the significance of handling the tools by the children alone, but some of the friends and relatives still got access to the cameras and therefore wasted several pictures.

Stage Three

Initially, the field work was designed to stop after the second stage interviews. However, changes to the left-behind children, such as shift in guardianship, transfer of schools, being held back and parents' divorce encouraged the

researcher to continue the process. Four groups of actors: the left-behind children including the boy who used to be left behind; their guardians; their parents if available; and, their teachers were re-interviewed in February 2010. The interview focused on any changes to the children that had taken place in the past year (see Appendices 14-15). Therefore, the children's experiences of being separated from their parents were ascertained from both their perspective and other people's perspectives, through a longitudinal approach. The sample in the last stage consisted of (see Appendix 3):

- 12 left-behind children which contained 5 left-behind students with grandparents and 7 with other type of guardianship. These seven with other forms of guardianship included:
 - 6 living with carers/teachers
 - 1 living with other relatives
- 1 not-left-behind boy living with his mother.

Of other people:

- 9 left-behind children's guardians
 - 5 left-behind children's grandmother
 - 1 manager of a surrogate family
 - 2 teachers who provide surrogate care
 - 1 left-behind child's aunt
- 1 not-left-behind child's grandmother
- 8 left-behind children's parents
- 1 not-left-behind child's mother
- 5 teachers

	M	F
Cared for by grandparents	2	3
Cared for by teachers	1	2
Living in surrogate families	2	1
Cared for by others	1	0
Cared for by one or both parents	1	0

Table 2.5: Semi-structured sample by gender and guardianship in Stage three: children

The use of a longitudinal approach

The adoption of a longitudinal approach throughout has been adopted for three main reasons: the merits of the method itself; the nature of the study, concerned as it is with change over time; and the possibility to carry out this strategy within the timeframe of doctoral research.

Firstly, as Bryman has commented, longitudinal methods shed light on social change and enhanced the understanding of “causal influence over time” (2004, p.48). He argues that the employment of longitudinal approach enables the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of sometimes, quite dramatic, social change, e.g. revolution, a peace process, and in this case, the social impact of labour migration. It provides researchers with the opportunity to explore the experiences of individuals as well as “special groups”, for example, children, old people, people with disabilities or others often defined as “vulnerable”. Furthermore the impact of the social change on certain group of people can be clarified by allowing them to reflect upon their lives at different periods of time as they come to terms with the complexity of the change they are living through.

Secondly, a number of authors have argued that the impact of a parents’

absence may be starkly different due to a number of factors. These include the length of time they have been separated from their parents, their experiences at home, at school and in the community (Ye & Murray, 2005; Zhou, 2004); their attitude towards their life (Lv, 2007), and their expectations, which are also likely to change over time. It is important to understand in some detail the processes of change, and how and why these occur. Longitudinal method is ideal when the research focuses on the key transition periods in children's lives (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008). The longitudinal aspect of this study helps to address one of the common problems encountered by researchers into how the left-behind children experience "being left-behind". It is also possible that the process of their struggle, negotiations with their parents and guardians, and acceptance of their parents' absence will emerge as complex and different processes which also develop over time. In Lv (2007) argued that being left-behind is a dynamic process. The children in that research underwent a number of different changes in sequence, sometimes undertaking migration with their parents, before being eventually asked to return to their rural communities. Yet others were initially left behind, only to be reunited with their parents at a later date when they were able to join them in the place to which they had migrated. Clearly, children and young people would adjust to such complexities in different ways and the use of longitudinal methods allows for this to be explored.

Thirdly, the sample, location and research design chosen in the research make it possible to follow one cohort over a period of three years, with subjects being interviewed at three different points during that period. Most of the left-behind children and not-left-behind children researched in the first stage would not move away from the area or drop out of school and the research could therefore re-contact them through their class teachers.

"The key assertion of a longitudinal qualitative study summarizes how

the data, as a whole, reflect general participant changes through time---that is, throughout the course of the study.”

(Saldana, 2003, p, 11)

In this sense, the analysis and interpretation of how the researched perceive the differences or how the differences are perceived by others at different research stages is at the core of understanding the fluid life experiences of the targeted social group. However, time in this discourse is not exclusive to the phase from the beginning to the end of each research stage. Comparisons are not necessarily made according to a predetermined structure, such as the schedule of when the informants are studied. Time in this study can be seen in a more varied and complex way.

The fieldwork for this study was carried out three times, within one or two months of Chinese New Year, which is not only a cyclical time with which people mark the passing of time, but also a personal time when parents return home and then leave again. In the last two pieces of fieldwork, the participants were asked about anything that had happened to the children in the past year. The data was initially arranged and read in that order.

The plotting of the participants' experiences and perspectives in terms of a linear grid served to make cross-sectional comparison between different cases easier, but broke the flow of life events. Thus, their stories “can be conceptualized in terms of the more fluid and individualized notions of *turning points* or *defining moments*.” (Neale & Flowerdew, 2003, p.193). Their life trajectories were changed by these “critical moments” (Henderson, 2007; Thomson et al, 2002), such as a parent's accident, being held back in school or moving from one guardian to another. The influence of these unpredictable conditions on the children interplayed with the impact of their parent's migration on them to uncover each child's unique experiences of being left-behind.

Time in this research can also be understood as a reflection into the future (Neale & Flowerdew, 2003), such as the self-image in three years and expectations of parents and children for themselves in the future. In order to chart changes in circumstances and perceptions, a range of questions were repeated over time in different interviews with the same participant. This strategy not only served to compare different snapshots at different moments, but also placed the enquires and answers “in an exploration of processes and changes which look both backwards and forwards in time” (Neale & Flowerdew, 2003, p.194). Since the flow and dynamics of the children’s lives began taking shape in light of a flexible conception of time, analysing change through time became an essential part of the entire process of data analysis.

The questions Saldana brought forward to guide the analysis of longitudinal qualitative data were referred to before starting to interpret the data. Based on the data, the researcher attempted to answer the following questions:

“Framing Questions

What is different from one pond or pool of data through the next?

When do changes occur through time?

What contextual and intervening conditions appear to influence and affect participant changes through time?

What preliminary assertions (propositions, findings, results, conclusions, interpretations, and theories) about participant changes can be made as data analysis progresses?

Descriptive Questions

What increases or emerges through time?

What is cumulative through time?

What kinds of surges or epiphanies occur through time?

What decreases or ceases through time?

What remains constant or consistent through time?

What is idiosyncratic through time?

What is missing through time?

Analytic and Interpretive Questions

Which changes interrelated through time?

Which changes through time oppose or harmonize with natural human

development or constructed social processes?
What are participant or conceptual rhythms (phases, stages, cycles, and so on) through time?
What is the through-line of the study?"
(Saldana, 2003, p63-65)

Not all questions had clear and straightforward answers due to the constraints and limitations of the researcher and the research, and the complexity of social activities in the community. While the use of longitudinal method assisted the researcher to explore the dynamics of being left-behind and the cumulative nature of changes to the children affected and influenced by their parents' migration, the researcher's life and career is also affected by the longitudinal research practise, "since his or her own journey toward the destination is both processual and developmental" (Saldana, 2003, p.14)

Ethical Issues and Concerns about Children at Risk

The researcher initially did not have a clear idea on how to deal with many complex ethical issues involved in research into such sensitive subjects until she consulted with Dr Carol-Ann Hooper who had recently completed research on vulnerable children in England. She kindly made available her application for ethical clearance and an article she wrote after the research on some of the issues she and her colleagues had had to face. In the authors ethical statement, it suggested that "It is now standard practice that if abuse is disclosed, or evidence that a child is at risk is revealed during a research interview, exceptions must be made to confidentiality and the information passed on to ensure appropriate action can be taken to protect the child."

In rural China, neither social service nor any other agency is responsible for intervention in the case of suspected child abuse, or other child protection

issues. The social context in which the research has to respond to suspicions of welfare harm is therefore very different to those pertaining in the UK. However, the research still has ethical responsibility and was guided by a more general 'ethic of care'. What this involved was that, wherever possible, the research attempted to avoid any harm being done to respondents, and where there was perceived to be a danger of harm, ways were sought both to minimise harm or to offer appropriate help and support to participants. This required sensitivity and judgement as even drawing the attention of others to the distress of a participant child, may be to put the child at further risk if the distress is thought to bring shame on the family or community. In the event, no such incidents really occurred. But it was appropriate to plan for some form of additional support should it have been needed. Therefore the following procedures were arranged.

If during the course of an interview the researcher had become aware of any risk to children the researcher could have:

- Discussed with the guardians or parents any concerns she had about the child's safety, and explain what the researcher needed to do--- (unless this is thought to put the child at risk of even greater harm) see below;
- After consulting the parent and guardian (where possible), the researcher could have discussed with the school teacher or the local authorities who were thought to have more power over the child's parents and guardians the nature of the risk to the child;
- Should a child have thought to be at risk, at the end of the interview with a child, the researcher could have discussed with the child who the child might think might be able to help to make things better for her/him. Any action to discuss the situation with a third person, guardians, parents, the teacher or local authority, would also have been explained to the child.

In the event, none of these arrangements needed to be activated. But it was made clear to parents or guardians at the beginning of their participation that the promise of confidentiality could be breached if a child's safety was thought to be at risk, but that this would not be done without discussing this with them first.

However, in this research, because of cultural differences between China and the UK, it has to be recognised that it would have been difficult to get an agreement from the parents, guardians, school teachers, local authority and the researcher on whether a child is at risk. For instance, if, as did occur, knowledge that a child was beaten, such behaviour may be thought acceptable by the child's parents and ignored by the local authorities and school teachers. Furthermore, some of the researcher's concerns might reflect the biases of her background and expectations. The researcher's concern about the child's safety may, in rural China, be considered as inappropriate intervention to the very private life of family relationships. Ethical dilemmas and challenges therefore, inevitably presented themselves in this field.

Because its main research question concern being separated from a child's biological parents, there was always the possibility that listening to, and answering, questions might in itself be distressing to the children. It is recognized that the interviews raised issues which respondents sometimes found difficult to talk about. If they were obviously distressed, it was made clear to them that the interview could be terminated at their request at any stage. The ethical issue here is that the research should always try to avoid being harmful, to minimize the risk of it being harmful, or to minimize harm.

The nature of this sample of individual and families also meant that some of the participants might have experienced high level of trauma in their lives

especially the left-behind children. Carol-Ann Hooper stressed the importance of always regarding “consent throughout as an ongoing process”.

This certainly meant that the researcher had to make sure that the participants knew that they have the right to refuse answering any question they did not feel comfortable in addressing.

Since Chinese people, and more particularly children, may not be accustomed to refuse directly a request from adult, the researcher therefore had to make sure that she watched for non-verbal cues that the respondent was ill at ease with the question being asked. It was also recognised that sometimes body languages could be a sign that they did not want to share further information. For example, lowering their heads meant they got upset about the questions, or a long silence meant they anxious about whether to, or how to, reply and whether it is appropriate to do so. Their tone and emotion could be sensed in the interview as well.

In order to be sensitive to this issue, a number of options had been considered and discussed with Dr Hooper. Rather than using red and green cards which is what have been used in a Western context, a card showing an upset face was considered. In the event it was decided to use a red pen playing the role of the card. This was explained to all participants and was placed in front of the respondent during the course of the interview and the use of it was explained to all respondents. Should it be raised by the respondent at any time, the interview would have been terminated – or the interview moved on to another topic rather than focusing on the inquiry which made the respondent upset. If they did not want to answer the question they just need to raise the red pen. The respondent was also given practice in its use before the interview started.

In Western cultures there is also often someone in a professional capacity

(such as a counsellor or youth worker) from whom support can be given should the respondent be upset by the interview process or things discussed during the interview. This was not available in China. Should the researcher have become aware of the discomfort, distress, pain or inconvenience, the respondent would have been given the opportunity for the interview terminated, and the plan was that where necessary help from the class teacher would have been sought.

Data Analysis

The interpretation of data which make sense of respondents' stories and life experiences is given significant weight in qualitative research. The analysis should take place when the researcher commences the study (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). It should be

“part of the research design, part of the literature review, part of the theory formation, part of the data collection, part of the data ordering, filing and reading, and part of the writing”

(Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p, 258.)

The interpretation of the accounts not only allows the theory to develop, but also forms the basis for data collection and for decisions of which case to select next (Flick, 2006). In fact, in this research, the researcher abandoned the linear process of first collecting the data and later interpreting it, in favour of an interwoven procedure. The data analysis began with the data collection and sampling, which guided the research strategies, interview schedules and the participants in the following stage, through the ongoing transcription from the first stage of field work. The diversity of patterns and themes that emerged at

the early stage were continually shaping the whole study, in light of any new evidence uncovered and new thought arising.

In the event, key themes emerging from the previous interviews or observations were recorded in charts and employed as potential questions incorporating these within the general Interview – issues the researcher could explore through the participants' experiences and perspectives.

	April-June 2008	Jan-March 2009	February 2010
Child			
Guardians			
Teachers			
Parents			
Others			

Based on a simple interpretation of the field notes from participant observation, 13 participants were selected for the case studies. The design and context of the visual method was influenced by the informal analysis of drawings collected at the previous stage. All these procedures were referred to in previous sections.

All the data was read through or listened to with a few notes as soon as the data collection was concluded. Transcriptions were also completed prior to the next stage. Most of the literal text including researcher's field notes, research diary, children's essays, school reports, and the interview transcripts were inputted to the computer and printed out. The scrapbooks and photos taken by the children were scanned and ascribed to the relevant respondents. The

researcher read the transcripts several times in Chinese. On the first two times, she made great efforts to read through the initial set of transcripts, field notes and other documents etc without attempting to interpret or analyze them. A few notes were made if anything especially interesting, important, or significant struck the researcher. After the third reading, the researcher began to code the material. The traditional cutting and pasting method was employed. Key passages from field notes, interview transcripts and other documents were underlined and boldfaced. Codes were written down in the margins of data hard copies. Index cards were used for sorting and interrelating salient categories and coloured pens were used to identify the origins of the chunk of text. On the other side of the hard copies, the source of the texts, such as name and date, was written.

Data collected pertaining to the analysis of the 12 left-behind children one not-behind child taking part in the whole process was arranged in two ways: firstly, 13 units were created, one for each of them; the files in each unit involving codes were ordered in light of a time series. In this sense, the strategy served a case study and partly avoided the possible problem of losing the context of what was said (Bryman, 2004). Secondly, after examining the cases from a longitudinal perspective, the codes were refined with new themes and patterns emerging from the re-reading of the data. The chunks of text were distributed to new files and united with other cases. This served the comparison of events, phenomena, cases, concepts and categories between different cases.

The interpretation of qualitative data can be understood as “an attempt to tell a story about the interviews, observations, or other data that have been collected” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p269). To tell a good story, the issues concerning the source, the collected data, should be taken into account. First is the use of voice recordings. Recordings enabled the researcher to capture the

respondents' answers in their own words and make response to the answers more freely. Whilst the naturalness of the setting was influenced by the machine the tape recorder inhibited the depth of the conversation. The respondents could not simply forget about the tape recorder and talk about their experiences and perspectives naturally. The tape recorder was not refused when they returned the consent sheets, but a few of the subjects did not want the conversation to be recorded when the interview began. In this case, the researcher took down notes during the interview and wrote them up after the interview had concluded.

As part of the analysis process, data translation was another issue of concern. All the data collected is Chinese which is entirely different from English. Language conveys culture, ways of thinking, beliefs, and outlook of the world and education level of a particular person. Temple & Edwards assert that it functions as:

"... an important part of conceptualisation and incorporating values and belief. It carries accumulated and particular cultural, social, and political meanings that cannot simply be read off through the process of translation, and organises and prepares the experience of its speakers."

(Temple & Edwards, 2002, p3)

Thus, the researcher's task, as a translator at this stage was not merely converting the words from one language to another. The correct presentation of the meaning intended by the research participants necessitated close examination of concepts in different contexts. As Simon maintained that:

"This meaning is not located within the culture itself but in the process of negotiation which is part of its continual reactivation. ... Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings which

language carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhabit are "the same"."

(1996, as quoted in Temple & Edward, 2005, p.3)

The meaning and cultural connotations behind the context and the individual situation are at the core of translation. The majority of text from the field notes and transcripts remained in Chinese, with only selected quotes being translated into English. In this study, the process of translation consisted of constantly referring to the context from which the quotes were taken and negotiations about the corresponding concepts and sentences with the researcher's supervisor.

This study was designed to give voice to the vulnerable, and the researcher made endeavour to avoid distortion and misinterpretation of the data. Whilst the qualitative findings rely greatly on the researcher's values and relationships with the people studied (Bryman, 2004). To eliminate the researcher's personal bias, triangulation was employed which helped to challenge and establish the validity of findings from the instrument used to collect the data. This strategy refers to the use of a combination of multiple data, investigators, theories as well as methodologies in the study of the same object (Denzin, 1970).

In this study, triangulation involved the use of different methods with the same participants, these were: questionnaires, participant observation, semi-structured interviews and visual methods. The researcher's observations were checked out with the interview questions to determine whether she might have misunderstood what she had seen. Whilst the triangulation used in this research did not attempt to discover the 'truth', rather it tried to find out more comprehensive knowledge from different perspectives concerning the phenomenon of children being left behind. It

“... allows the research to develop a complex picture of the phenomenon being studied, which might otherwise be unavailable if only one method were utilised.”

(Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p40)

The collection of data from a diverse range of individuals (children, parents, guardians, teachers) and settings served to provide multiple aspects of some unique experiences of being left behind. The comparison between different accounts of the same events from different interviewees also allowed the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives, as well as the misunderstanding, tension or even conflicts in the actors' relations.

Reflections on the Research Process

Research entails an interaction between the researcher and the researched (Silverman, 2004). The social categories of the researcher and the informants, such as age, gender, class, educational background and personal circumstances, such as beliefs and values, as well as their role, as perceived by both the researcher and the researched, will inevitably influence their interaction and shape the research relationship, the depth of the interview, and the data analysis.. In this research, it was found that different types of participants had different reasons for offering their informed consent. The reasons show the relationship between the researcher and the interviewees, and shape their perspective and their telling of their experiences. The children perceived the researcher as a “star”, as she was introduced by their school teachers as a PhD student studying abroad. They showed high interest in overseas experiences and the culture in the host country following talks about

study and Britain given as a teaching assistant. They felt honoured to be selected to take part in the face-to-face interviews.

However, this did not mean they were able to talk about their experiences of being left behind without any hesitation. Therefore, to alleviate tension, the research started with the administration of a survey interview, which began with relatively innocuous questions, and only after this made the transition from these to more sensitive questions about the absence of their parents. Completing the survey interview allowed the children to become familiar with the researcher and the research purpose. It also helped to establish a relationship between the researcher, the informants and the research. Yet, the celebrity effect worked during the entire research process. Some children were very cautious with their answers and tried to embellish their behaviour for the sake of getting a positive reaction from a “successful” person. For instance, many children described their expectations as to go to university and study abroad in the future. They also placed their school performance at least at a pass level, which was not the truth according to their school teachers.

“The story is being told to particular people; it might have taken a different form if someone else were the listener” (Riessman, 1993 in Miller & Glassner, 2004 in Silverman, 2004, p.127). Interviewees determine how to respond to a researcher based on who they are. For the children, the researcher might be a role model, and her presence could be their future. But for their temporary guardians and their migrant parents, the researcher was an absolute outsider. She did not share any particular similarities with them. They were ambivalent about the research and unable to foresee immediate benefits, their reasons for participation in the research was often a response to a person who had some connection with the children’s school teachers. Therefore the researcher was taken seriously and regarded as a teacher. They thought both the children and themselves should take part in the research because of the children’s welfare

in school. Although the information sheet and consent form were given, their research participation was considered as a form of homework and the researcher was deemed to be an uncaring data collector (with the unspoken role of a kind of government inspector) with a huge social gap between us in terms of background, educational level, life style.

To overcome these obstacles, the researcher tried to build a rapport, ensured and reassured confidentiality and established trust during the research process. The longitudinal nature of this research allowed the researcher to achieve a mutually trusting relationship with the children's parents and guardians through interaction with the children and themselves and favourable feedback about their initial participation. The researcher's image as a powerful inspector was replaced by a considerate and supportive older sister to their children. This perception shortened the distance between the researcher and the informants to some extent, by removing the inequality of power between them. In some cases, the researcher shared her own concerns with the left-behind children or with their guardians or parents, as it was hoped that the disclosure would encourage a more open interview with the parents and help establish a rapport, involving both trust and credence.

Since there was trust and familiarity in the relationship between the researcher and the researched, the significant differences between them in terms of age, education and social background, allowed the informants to disclose more information about their experiences. Mille and Glassner put it this way:

“ ... the interviewee can recognize him-or herself as an expert on a topic of interest to someone typically in a more powerful position... To find oneself placed in this position can be both empowering and illuminating because one can reflect on and speak about one's life in ways not often available.”

(Mille & Glassner ,2004, quoted in Silverman, 2004, p.132)

Without an insider status, some adults, especially the older generation, would be more likely to give detailed explanations to the interviewer, who seemed to know nothing about village life and child rearing. For instance, an interviewee said to the researcher, “You never know how hard the workload is. We get up very early in the morning, feed up the animals, cook the breakfast, and then work on the farm. ... We are exhausted when the sun has set. I guess your parents aren’t so tired every day”. Obviously, the interviewee attempted to make the researcher understand their hard life by describing their daily life in details. And the comparison she made with other outsiders relevant to the researcher allow them to rationalize their discontent with their situation to a person who might not share the same perspective as a result of being in different social categories.

It was also most three years from the first time the researcher was introduced to the children to the last time the researcher did interviews with them and people related to them. The role of the researcher was never fixed for either the children or the adults. The research benefitted from the multiple roles the researcher took on or was expected to take on. For example, children expected me to be a story teller, a tutor and a star, rather than a researcher. They asked me all kinds of questions about the UK, such as “what do British people eat as a meal?” Some of them turned to me if they encountered any problems when I was involved with their schooling as a teacher assistant. A few of them invited me to their houses for dinner and required me to sign my signature on their notebooks. I was expected to undertake roles as a teacher, a listener and a consultant by their parents and their guardians. On many occasions, the researcher was asked to encourage the children to study hard and impart some learning skills to them. Since a rapport had been built up and confidentiality assured, they disclosed a negative story about the children, the

conflicts between generations or dissatisfaction at the society, such as policies or popular values, which required the researcher to be a patient listener. A left-behind child's mother sought advice from me about her child's education arrangements, and a professional surrogate parent referred her graduated daughter's career planning to me.

This attitude by the informants mainly resulted from the strategies of accessing the respondents through the school and the initial research practice, participant observation, which led to a difficulty with drawing clear boundaries between the researcher's role and other roles, both for the researcher and the informants. The researcher's trustworthiness was enhanced through the researcher's role playing process. However, sometimes different attitudes towards the researcher's role inevitably lead to a distortion of the truth, such as a "star" and a powerful inspector, discussed above. Furthermore, the stories were constructed differently to those told to a friend or to an interviewer. Thus, to maximise the likelihood of obtaining in-depth information, adopting a reasonably flexible approach to the researcher's own role as a researcher was necessary. This approach involved an attempt to avoid adverse misunderstanding of the researcher's role and an awareness of their interpretation of the researcher's role when they were narrating their experiences or feelings.

Conclusions

This chapter has presented a brief view of previous studies, the research approach adopted for this study, recruitment and location, sampling, data collection process, data analysis methods, ethnical issues and a reflection of the research process. The use of longitudinal method and visual method are

claimed to be the main strengths for the research. Left-behind children, and not-left-behind children involved in this longitudinal study and visual method research as well as some of their teachers, guardians, parents and other people interviewed provide key informants to help explore the experiences of left-behind children in rural China and the impact of their parent's migration. The following chapters will focus on analysing the stories collecting from 13 cases and other data.

Chapter 3 Case Studies

Introduction

This chapter examines the experience of being left behind of children participating in the study. Four case studies are presented in detail, to demonstrate four key types of guardianship which are common to other left-behind children and the experience of children who have one parent who has migrated. The latter was included because the experience of being left behind by one parent proved to be a common experience within the dynamics of being left behind. The four were also chosen because all of them had a change of guardianship. Whilst the four case studies contain detail which might render them unique stories they also provide some commonalities from which further themes and patterns emerge.

Cheng's Case

Cheng, who is 13 years old, is now living with his mother. He is shorter and thinner than other boys of his age. He seems to wear the same jacket with stains all the time. When I did my first stage field work he was 11 and living with his grandparents (both in their 60s) on his father's side. Both of his parents had been living and working away for a year in a large city, a thousand miles away, where they did heavy physical work. I spent three weeks with him and his classmates as a teaching assistant. At the beginning I interviewed him using the questionnaire. Nothing special stood out in terms of his answers. I took him

to be an 'ordinary' left-behind child who led a similar life to most of the others. This means I took for granted that he was probably worse disciplined than not-left-behind children, lacked close supervision and suffered loneliness.

The longer time I spent with him and other villagers the better I got to know him. Apart from being a participant observer, I interviewed his paternal grandmother, his maternal grandmother, his cousin, his school teachers, his classmates and the caretaker at his school. More themes emerged from these interviews. At the second stage of my research I interviewed his mother who had returned home to the village for Chinese New Year. I also interviewed his paternal grandmother again in March 2009. The final stage of the research took place around Chinese New Year 2010, during which interviews were conducted with his paternal grandmother, his teacher, his mother and Cheng himself.

Cheng's case study helps us begin to explore the processes associated with adapting to being a left-behind-child and how this impacts on his relationships with his parents, his guardians, his school teachers and other people in the community. We can also witness other complex processes related to his guardians' reaction to, and negotiation with, his life situation and the importance of the interaction between one domain (his family) and other aspects of his life, such as his school identity as a left-behind-child and his feelings and emotions over time.

Both of Cheng's parents used to work on the land in the village, before making the decision to go to a big city and leave their son with somebody to take care of him. They had two choices: his grandparents on his father's side and his grandparents on his mother's side. Traditionally, paternal grandparents should be considered as the first choice to act as guardians for a child, as they share the same family name. But Cheng's paternal grandparents had a lot of farm work to do, and furthermore, his paternal grandfather was not in good health.

His maternal grandparents, however, ran a local shop, which meant they would have more time to take care of Cheng. Their health was also better than his paternal grandparents. Taking this into consideration, he was left to be looked after in the house of his maternal grandparents.

Initially, he was content with his parents' absence. But his new guardians hardly ever disciplined him as his parents did. He was allowed to watch the TV for hours and hours. They were too busy with their shop to look after him in a more appropriate and disciplined way. His maternal grandmother commented:

"You know, we have to feed the animals (chicken, ducks), look after the shop, do house work. He seemed to be happy without anybody watching him."

Most left-behind children living with grandparents lack close supervision and discipline. Moreover, one of the main reasons he stayed with his maternal grandparents was that they owned a shop where he could get snacks. However, after an "incident", he was kept away from the shop and relocated to his paternal grandparents.

The "incident" involved him being caught stealing money from the shop. His cousin witnessed the whole process and remonstrated with him and pushed him physically out of the shop, physical contact which would have brought him great shame. His maternal grandparents approved of the cousin's actions and warned Cheng not to set foot in the shop again. Cheng's maternal grandmother said:

"He needed a good lesson. He was always stealing snack food from the shop. I pretended not to notice this. This time I lost my temper. He stole money from the money box! I forbade him to come into my shop"

again. It served him right!”

Cheng insisted on leaving and going to his paternal grandparents. His maternal grandparents were willing to let him go. His paternal grandparents felt their grandson was not properly looked after and they should take care of someone who in the future, would bear the family name. The transition was completed in a week. The paternal grandparents attributed Cheng's theft of the money to the influence of his “bad friends”. His paternal grandmother reported:

“He never did that before. After his parents went away, he made friends with some bad boys. They hate studying and steal money to buy toys and snacks.”

His paternal grandparents also noticed Cheng's secretive behaviour. They mentioned another incident which happened during the summer of 2007. His paternal grandmother could not find him anywhere one afternoon. She was worried about her grandson's safety, as he might have drowned in the flood waters. Finally she found him at his classmate's house. She did not dare to scold him as she was afraid her grandson would run away if he was too upset and angry with her. She also found that he had some toys and snack food which he could never have afforded from his pocket money, which he got from his paternal grandfather and she knew no one else in the village would give him money. According to other shopkeepers, Cheng also used to borrow things from their shops and promise to pay for them in a couple of months. His parents had left some money for him at a shop close to the school, but he had also “borrowed” toys from more than three other shops.

His paternal grandmother found that Cheng was not as easy to discipline as before as she explained:

“...every time I ask him to do housework, collecting the dishes for example, he gets angry.”

I also witnessed his anger when he became frustrated. A group of boys wanted to get into his classroom, but he and his classmates were not letting them in, and barred the door against them. Finally, the boys broke into the classroom. Cheng got angry and pushed one of the boys against the wall.

“His face flushed with anger. He grasped the boy’s collar and pushed him against the wall...”

(Researcher’s observation notes).

His paternal grandparents had to do heavy farm work. They had only a low level of education. Therefore, they had neither the time or the ability to tutor their grandson. Nobody supervised his studies or checked his homework which, in the past, had been thoroughly scrutinised by his parents. His paternal grandparents expressed their worries about his school performance which was getting worse:

“We have to get up very early in the morning and then go to work in the fields. After cooking three meals for the family and feeding the chickens and pigs, we are exhausted. Even when we are not tired, we are not able to supervise him. His homework is hard for us.”

Cheng himself concurred:

“My mother used to check my homework. After they left home, I started finishishing my homework very fast and not minding whether it was fine or rubbish.”

To Cheng, the role of his paternal grandparents is like a nursemaid. They provided him with food and shelter but were not able to supervise him. The paternal grandmother also commented on his lack of emotional communication with them:

“The only thing we can do is to make sure is that he has enough food and clothing and he is in safe hands. We must return a healthy boy to his parents, you know. It is not easy for us to take care of him... He seldom tells us what he is thinking about. He talks with his mum on the phone but not to us. Whenever you ask him: “How is everything going?”, he just says: “Fine”.”

The researcher also explored this aspect of the relationship and asked him:

“Who do you confide in?”

Cheng: My mom and my good friends.

There was also a long running dispute with his paternal grandparents about Cheng's fascination with soldiers and guns:

Researcher: Do your paternal grandparents know what do you want to be in the future?

Cheng: They do not know I want to be a soldier. They do not approve. Anytime I want to watch the troops on TV they force me to change the channel. They do not allow me to play with toy guns or swords. They say it is dangerous to be a soldier or even play with toy guns.

According to Cheng, his mother had previously not been strict about this. He always asked his mother to buy him toy guns when they were chatting on the phone. Cheng tried to call his mother when his paternal grandparents were not

at home and never talked about toy guns over the phone with his parents when his paternal grandparents were around.

When I did the second stage research with him during Chinese New Year 2009, I found that the longer he stayed with his paternal grandparents the less he spoke to them. Furthermore his school performance had also proved to be much worse than before. Perhaps because of this, his mother decided to no longer work away after the Chinese New Year, when many of the migrants went back to the city. Making such a decision was quite hard. Staying in the village was not able to guarantee her a good income. Prior to working away she had worked on the land and she knew that the productivity of the land depended much on the weather. Working away in a factory had provided a reliable and necessary income. She did not decide to stay with Cheng until the bus which would take her to the railway station arrived. Cheng was crying about his mother going away and she changed her mind at the last moment and went home with him. His mother also seemed concerned about how Cheng's paternal grandparents were looking after him. Her own mother felt that Cheng's falling school performance (from the middle to the bottom of the class) could be attributed to his grandparents neglecting their duty.

Researcher: What do you think of his grandparents as guardians?

Mother: They are all right, you know you can't depend on them to look after Cheng like I do. They used to look after Cheng's cousin whose school performance was very good, but Cheng's school performance got worse after he started living with them. They did not take care of him whole-heartedly.

His mother also felt that her son was not as active as before, and that he had become quieter after his parents started to work away.

*Mother: He became quiet, before we worked away he used to talk a lot.
Now he only answers questions.*

She suggested that Cheng's paternal grandparents did not know how to talk to Cheng and they were not good communicators. On the other hand, Cheng's paternal grandparents complained about his parents' migration and about his parents constantly playing mahjong during the Chinese New Year holiday.

"They just want to make money, leave their son to us. We know we should understand them and support them. But we do not have enough time and energy to look after Cheng. They did not spend much time with Cheng but on playing mahjong day and night, saying that it was the only time they have time to play mahjong."

(Cheng's paternal grandmother)

According to the photographs that he took, it seems that his school friends played an (increasingly) significant part in his life after his parents left to work away. All the photographs show them playing together. I asked him why he had not taken photographs of his parents and he told me that they were too busy with mahjong to get involved in his pictures. He only pasted the photos into his scrapbook and described them with simple words after I asked him to do so. Before I went through his scrapbook with him I had telephoned both him and his parents to make sure he had done so. I also explained that it was fine for his parents to give him a hand. But, in the event, they did not help him as they were busy "occupied with mahjong playing" (Cheng)

To his head-teacher, Cheng was a clever, but underachieving, boy, who could do very well if he worked hard. After his parents' migration, she thought he showed signs of a lack of discipline and being properly looked after. She

stated:

“Look at his hands and neck, they are too dirty. He looks like an orphan. His grandparents do not care about him at all.”

“His grandparents never discipline him. He looks like a wild horse.”

“I ask his grandparents not to give him pocket money, but he is still able to get rubbish food and toys from the shops.”

“He does not do his homework very well and spends most of his after school time with some bad boys whose school performance is really poor and he wastes lots of money on toys and rubbish food. His paternal grandparents should have kept an eye on him.”

“They (Cheng’s paternal grandparents) seldom come in (to school) nor call us. His parents’ used to call us several times a term and see how he was doing at school.”

His head teacher also sensed changes in his behaviour after his parents’ migration. He was said to be more likely to tell lies, feel inferior and be more than usually quiet.

“Cheng often tells lies! Last time I asked him to tell his grandparents to come and see me, he told me his grandparents were not at home. I went to his grandparents’ house and found out that he was not telling the truth. They were at home...”

“He is not as active as before. He always keeps silent when other students discuss things in class...sometimes he knows the answer, but

you have to push him. He is not as confident as before.”

He was quiet both at home and in class, but after school and before going home he was reported to be very noisy and mischievous. As both his grandparents and teachers reported, he started playing with some ‘bad boys’ (renowned for their poor school performance and trouble making to both their own families and throughout the community). He also got involved in some bad behaviour probably because of them. This involved fighting with classmates, telling lies, wasting money on toys and rubbish food and playing around in the village, rather than going home and doing his homework. The school caretaker (who lives in the school) reported:

“Other pupils went home. Only he (Cheng) and some bad boys were still playing around. His grandparents should discipline him. Maybe they are too busy.”

“They shout, scream and make lots of noise by using their toys (and) fighting with each other.”

“He often fights with his classmates. Sometimes he teases but sometimes he really bullies them.”

When I did the first stage interview with Cheng, I asked him what was the happiest thing at school. He replied that it was playing with friends. This was backed up by the photos he took during the second stage, which showed him with his best friends at school. When it came to the question of the saddest thing that had happened to him, Cheng suggested that his parents’ working away made him very upset, as he missed them a lot and was not able to concentrate on his schoolwork.

Researcher: Does anything makes you very sad or affect your life?

Cheng: Each time my parents migrate (they used to stay at home for a couple of weeks and then went to the city again) let me down for a long time. I cannot focus on my homework. I feel lonely and sad when I am alone.

He never told his grandparents (neither paternal nor maternal) or his parents that he missed his parents and he was upset by this.

Researcher: Did you mention that you weren't happy about the migration to your parents or grandparents?

Cheng: Not at all

Researcher: Why not?

Cheng: I was afraid that my mom would get worried about me.

He admits that after his parents' migration he only talked about his feelings to his friends and occasionally to his mother over the phone but not to his guardians.

Researcher: Do you talk to your classmates?

Cheng: Yes.

Researcher: How about your teachers?

Cheng: Never.

Researcher: Your parents?

Cheng: Yes, sometimes on the phone when my grandparents are not in.

Researcher: Why don't you want your grandparents to overhear your conversation?

Cheng: They might be angry if I ask for a toy gun as a present when

my parents come back.

After Chinese New Year 2009, Cheng's mother remained at home to look after him by herself, which meant that Cheng had at least one of his parents to look after him. Under the definition of left-behind-children used in this research, this meant he was no longer a left-behind-child by February 2009, when the second stage of the interviews took place. During the final stage he seemed taller and stronger. His jacket was also cleaner than before and his school teacher told me that his school performance was slightly better than last year and he spent less time hanging around with "bad boys". He also did not lose his temper so easily. His mother had been to the school twice and had taken an interest in his exam scores and his school performance. This suggests that his mother's return had had a beneficial effect on his well-being. However, his paternal grandmother had reservations, and there is other evidence that things are far from settled. His paternal grandmother continued to blame his mother's mahjong playing, which she said happened night after night. Cheng also often slept at his paternal grandmother's house, as his mother came back from her games very late in the evening. However, his mother did supervise his study occasionally in the evenings when she was not playing mahjong, but these were few and far between. Cheng hoped his mother could spend more time with him and missed the days when both of his parents were at home.

"When my father was at home he checked my homework, then we played chess. Sometimes my parents played against each other and I was the judge. My mother is not interested in playing with me now. We do not talk a lot as before."

(Cheng)

Cheng's mother also felt they were not as close as before. She attributed this emotional distance to the space distance when she was working in the city.

When it came to mahjong play, she said it was an important form of relaxation after the heavy farm work and housework, and that it took her mind off her husband's absence:

"I work so hard in the day. I need some fun in the evening. His father is not at home and I feel very lonely and bored at night. Mahjong playing makes me forget that."

Analysis

In many ways Cheng represents quite a typical left-behind-child, for whom being left behind does seem to be correlated with some negative indicators associated with a decline in his well-being. Before his mother's return, he was observed to be dirty and unwashed on several occasions, with the same stains on his jacket and unwashed hands. This seems to indicate that neither set of grandparents was as vigilant as his parents had been about his daily hygiene. This "lack of care" is also manifest in his being allowed to drift into "bad habits" such as failing to do his homework, telling lies, spending excessive amounts of money (without his grandparents' knowledge) on snacks and toys, some of which involved running up debts at local shops. His telling untruths is noted not only by his grandparents but by staff at the school, and seems to be associated with his becoming secretive to defend himself from accusations. It also suggests that he resents too much intrusion into what others define as "bad behaviour". All this culminates in his theft of money from his maternal grandparents' shop, his expulsion from it, and the eventual transfer of responsibilities for his care from his maternal to his paternal grandparents.

But there was more to the decline in his behaviour than individual incidents and a lack of care and control by his guardians. Emotionally, Cheng also seemed to

be responding badly to his parent's absence. He lost his temper easily and got into fights. He recognised that he could no longer share things with his mother, including his dreams for a future in the army. In the absence of his mother, he turned to a group of friends, who were regarded as being the "bad boys" of the village. He started hanging around with them, allowing them to get him into trouble, and symptomatic of their importance placed them in positions of predominance in the scrapbook which he (reluctantly) made.

However, the story is not a simple linear story of a decline in his well-being. A significant sub-theme is the way in which his parents (and his mother more particularly) struggle with a range of dilemmas to do with how they can best promote his well-being. They know that, in order to earn a better living for themselves and their family, both of them must work away from the village on construction sites in far off cities. But they do not simply walk away from their responsibilities as parents. They agonise about who might provide the best care for their son. And when they think their initial decision about placing him with their maternal grandparents was a mistake, they do something about it and re-arrange for him to stay with his paternal grandparents. They also want to make sure he too benefits from their relative economic prosperity and leave money with a local shop so Cheng can buy toys and snacks. Cheng goes on to take advantage of this, and run up debts with other shops, in which his parents had not left money. His mother is also in regular telephone contact with her son, and these are occasions in which he feels able to talk with her about his own ambitions for the future (so long as he is able to do so without his grandparents listening to him). But, clearly his mother does show concern for his welfare whilst they are living apart.

Eventually, Cheng's mother begins to recognise the emotional damage her absence is doing to her son and following Chinese New Year 2009, she stays behind in the village once again to look after him. This is probably not an easy

thing for her to do and the cost to her is loneliness, which leads her to spend more and more time in the evening time playing mahjong with her friends.

All this suggests that “being left behind” involves a set of complex material and emotional judgements by parents, which have an equally complex impact on the children they leave behind. It is not simply a matter of migrating, leaving the village, as a one off event. It is a matter of making arrangements for the surrogate care of children, keeping in touch with them by telephone and letter whilst they are away, making arrangements in the village for means by which the child can share in the prosperity they are creating, returning to the village when they can (especially at holiday time), re-assessing the care arrangements, and where necessary, making alternative arrangements. As can be seen in some of the other cases, this might involve exploring other, non-family-based, arrangements for the care and control of children. Cheng’s case illustrates the process of being left behind as a dynamic set of decisions, involving changes of mind and alterations to living arrangements.

Because of the importance of treating being left behind as a dynamic process, it also becomes necessary to regard its impact as a dynamic process which changes over time. In Cheng’s case, this is most obvious when considering his mother’s return. After her return, there is a reversal of some of the adverse effects which happened when the parents left, in terms both of physical manifestations (his clothing and hygiene improved), school performance (which improves) and emotional stability (he is more settled and disciplined, even though this is threatened by his mother’s absence seeking consolation in mahjong playing). In other cases, the treatment of being left behind as a process, illustrates how its impact changes over time, but also develops momentum and (sometimes) negative consequences, which can become irreversible. However, in Cheng’s case, his mother’s return seems to have reversed some of the negative consequences of her initial departure.

Xin's Case

Xin is a 12-year-old boy who in 2010 had been left behind for 3 years. However, he is not a left-behind-child in the strict sense; although both of his parents are working away in big city, he is also not living in his home village as he did before his parents left.

Xin's parents started working in Tianjin (near Beijing) in 2007 when he was 9 years old. He lived with his grandmother for a year. When I did the first stage research, he had just moved into a "professional surrogate family" two months previously. The "professional surrogate family" was owned by a couple who live in the town. They acted as "host" to a number of children both from the town and the surrounding countryside. They provided food and shelter to the children, and they were also responsible for checking the children's homework, exam papers and taking and picking them up from school. They do not work during the long vacations, during which many of the children have to return home. The parents pay 400 Yuan (£40) for the expenses and services every month. The average income of a farmer in rural areas is 12,000 Yuan per year (£1200); the average income of a migrant worker is 20,000 Yuan per year (£2000).

There were 4 left-behind children in this house. The other three were older than Xin and the couple were their first guardians after their parents' migration. Previously, however, Xin had lived with his paternal grandmother for a year and relocated to this house in spring 2008. When he moved to the surrogate family, he also changed school from a rural school to one in the town. Xin's story presented a combination of being left-behind and migration.

I interviewed his school teacher, his guardians and Xin at the first stage of the fieldwork. At the second stage, I interviewed his school teacher, his guardians his mother who had returned home to the village for Chinese New Year in 2009. The final stage of the research took place around Chinese New Year 2010, during which interviews were conducted with all the previous participants except Xin's mother.

When I did my first interview with him, he was very shy, and had very few words to answer my questions. He was often completely silent or answered "I do not know". He said his greatest dislike was his father's cards playing (a kind of gambling), and the thing he most liked to see was his father and mother getting on together, with no quarrels or fights. He was obviously aware that his parents' marriage might be in danger, even before they went to work away and he was clearly affected by this. Other information I got from his school and his guardians. According to his teacher, Xin was in grade 3 but his learning ability was much lower than other students in his class and he had a lack of interest in any subject or motivation to study. He never put his hand up and never answered the teachers' questions in class. His homework was seldom done well.

"He does not know how to do easy multiplication and division under 10, which should be grasped in grade 2. He only recognises a few hundred characters. When I ask him to answer questions, he just stands there and does not say anything. After I contacted his carer, this situation got better."

(Xin's school teacher)

His guardians felt the same way:

“He was too slow. It seems that his brain did not programme at all. His mother told me that the school he used to attend was not a proper school. His paternal grandmother did not pay attention to his study at all. He never finished his homework without our pushing him. When we asked him whether he had done his homework, he said he had. We trusted him at the beginning till his school teacher contacted me and complained about his homework. He had not done his homework on many occasions. We checked his homework from then on. But he cheated us with some work that had already been done in class. We had to assist him with his homework. It seems that he learned nothing at home. He might fail the term exam and be held back.”

Initially he did not have a good relationship with the other children in his class. His class teacher hardly saw him playing and talking with other pupils. His guardian (Mrs. Li) noticed that Xin was so quiet; he would rather keep silent if nobody spoke to him. However, he talked to his parents when they telephoned Mrs. Li, but he became quiet again when the communication ended. His guardians also found that he was not very close to his grandmother who visited him once. She spent just a few minutes with her grandson and then quickly left.

Initially, I too did not pay much attention to this quiet boy, due to his lack of words. Both his teacher and his guardians had also only known him for a short while, the data they provided did not particularly suggest he was an interesting case to explore in detail. However, I changed my mind when I talked to people again at the second stage of the research.

In February 2009, he was 11 and in grade 4. He was taller and stronger than the year before. At the second stage, I interviewed Xin, his teacher, his guardians, and his mother who had come back for Chinese New Year. His school teacher told me that his school performance was much improved and

he was more involved in collective activities. He had also made friends with his classmates. From his guardians' point of view, as well, he was more outgoing and positive. He also made an effort to complete the scrapbook with his father and took photos to include in it. I interviewed his mother about how he came to live in the town.

Xin's guardians told me that Xin's parents had some gambling debts, and as the income from cultivation when they lived in the village was quite low, they decided to go to city when he was 9-years-old. Xin had to be left behind with his grandmother on his father's side, who was a widow but had two sons (one of which was Xin's father). His grandmother was not an easy-going person and did not like Xin at all. She liked her oldest grandson whose father was her oldest son. She seldom talked to Xin and never supervised his studies. She was impatient when Xin's parents talked to her on the telephone about Xin's life. She would also be very unhappy if they wanted to talk to their son on the phone. Xin used to write a letter to his mother once a week, but because his parents changed their address frequently, she only received a few of them and did not reply to any. After he moved to the town he stopped writing to his mother any longer. The only real source of communication for Xin was a dog. He took a lot of pictures of the dog, rather than other family members, using the disposable camera I gave him. When I asked why he took so many pictures of the dog, he said he regarded the dog as his best friend. The dog could share his feelings and made him happy.

Xin: I like the dog very much. It is not a dog, is my companion. I only tell my story to him.

When he was lonely and sad in his grandmother's house the first thing he would do was talk to the dog. Even now he had friends, he still missed the dog and only wanted to share his emotions with him.

Xin: I miss the dog. Only he can understand me. My new friends can't understand what I am talking about sometimes. Then I won't tell them again. The dog can.

His mother sensed that Xin was more cheerful in the surrogate family than in his grandmother's house. Xin admitted that he liked the guardians and other children there. He took photos of the classroom in the house, showing the seat where he sat.

When I saw Xin for the third time in February 2010, he was in grade 5. His parents had divorced and his mother had married a man who lived a thousand miles away. I recalled that when I did my first interview with him, he did not know his parents' divorce until the winter vacation. Then his mother did not come back home for Chinese New Year. There had also been fewer phone calls since she broke up with Xin's father. His guardian did not recognise what must have been big changes in his life. In Mrs. Li's opinion, "everything was fine last year". He led a routine life as other children did. But he disliked holidays because that meant he had to go to his grandmother's house. He was very sad when he came back after the Nation Day holiday (7 days) because he had learned of the death of his dog. His guardians also realised that he was quite sad and silent after he found out about his parents' divorce. His father called more often on the telephone but his mother's absence upset him.

He did not do his homework very well and was involved in less activities than during his previous year at school. His school did not know what had happened to him, but noticed some changes.

From Xin's point of view, although his parents often quarrelled, they were his family. His mother would not come back. Adding insult to injury, his father did

not return home for Chinese New Year either. Xin was told that his father wanted to get more money for living expenses, so he had chosen to work in the city during the New Year period. He felt he was being abandoned by them. Although his parents asked somebody to bring toys and clothes to him, he was not at all happy.

“My mother said she will come to see me when I go to middle school and take me to big cities in the future. I do not want toys and new clothes. I just want to be with them together, even a few days.”

(Xin)

Analysis

The most obvious difference between Xin and Cheng is the involvement of the “professional surrogate family”. As discussed in Cheng’s case, being left behind is a complex process that changes over time. In this process, due to the changes in the external environment, left-behind-children vary in aspects of their daily life, school life, social relationships, and feelings. These changes unfold as distinct features in different phases.

I commented above, that at stage one of the research he was perceived by everyone as having a low study ability, confirmed by his guardian and school teacher. This persuaded his parents of the wisdom of moving him to a town school. This also led them to question whether the supervision he was receiving from his grandmother was also part of the problem and so they explored the alternative of him being looked after in a surrogate house. However, his mother did not offer him sufficient encouragement and support as Xin did not get any letters from her. However, his parents spent a quarter of their annual income in looking after him and transferring him to another school.

After living in the surrogate house for a while, his ability to study improved, and he formed better study habits. In addition to this, his social relationships with other people also improved. His parents' migration and his paternal grandmother's antipathy and hostility made Xin emotionally insecure, which was reflected in his reliance on a pet for solace. Xin's description of the dog, the dog's pictures and his sadness at the dog's death suggest that loneliness, helplessness and fragility can flood in the mental world of left-behind children. Xin's school performance, however, improved as a result of being supervised and assisted in his studies out of school. Initially, unlike Cheng, Xin tended to withdraw from his peer group, and held a passive attitude to the researcher (not being very active and often keeping silent). The concern and attention Xin got from the surrogate house made him more confident and eventually led to a more positive attitude toward his classmates and other people.

The increase in his parents' income due to their migration also enhanced his material well-being. He found some compensation for their absence in the form of toys and clothes. But these could not really offset the impact of their absence. To make the matter worse, Xin's parents divorced, which provided a new form of stress. Not only did he experience the process of being left behind, but also the process of his parents' separation with quarrels finally leading to their divorce. Xin suffered a more severe and complex set of emotional disturbances than other left-behind children. The divorce rate in rural areas of China is increasing and more attention should be paid to this issue and its effect on children. In Western societies, it has long been recognised that the divorce of parents can have a markedly harmful effect on children's well-being. School-aged children may experience grief, embarrassment, resentment, divided loyalty and intense anger and feel rejected by the parent who left (DeBord, 1997; Rogers & Prior, 1998).

Yu's Case

Yu is a 13-year-old boy in grade 5, living in the same surrogate family as Xin. However, when I first interviewed him, in May 2008, he was living with his uncle and aunt. Both of his parents had migrated six months before that. When I interviewed him for the second time, he had failed to go up to grade 5 with his classmates, due to his very low exam marks and poor school performance. His mother was very worried about that, and after consultation with other people, she took up their suggestion and sent him to a "professional surrogate family". When I did my final stage research, he had been living in the family for five months.

I only interviewed Yu and his school teacher at the first stage of my research. His guardians (his uncle and aunt) at that time claimed to be too busy to talk with me in 2008. But his mother took part in my research in two occasions when I did my second stage fieldwork during Chinese New Year in 2009. Yu and his school teacher were also interviewed. All of them were interviewed at the final stage of the research shortly after Chinese New Year in 2010.

Yu's story is not particularly outstanding compared to other cases, but his mother's response to the impact her migration had on him and her endeavours to improve Yu's living environment are both interesting and remarkable. Not only did she make material compensation for her absence, but she also went out of her way to seek other ways to improve Yu's well-being.

Like most parents in China, Yu's mother has great expectations for his future. She and her husband chose to go to a big city, at least in part, in order to save more money for Yu's education. When it came to deciding who was able to

take care of her son she regarded both her parents and those of her husband as being too old to look after him. Finally she turned to her brother and promised to pay him some money to look after Yu. Her brother reluctantly agreed to shoulder the responsibility. He also had his own son to look after as well as being responsible for Yu's welfare. If anything went wrong, injury for instance, he would be blamed. From Yu's mother's perspective, her brother had an 8 year-old-boy, so that they could go to school together and do homework in each other's company. Furthermore, living with his uncle, he would at least have better food in the restaurant run by Yu's uncle.

His mother called Yu on the telephone every week when she was working away, and asked him about his study and his life in general. He always reported the good news but not the bad, trying to pretend things were fine. When she returned home and checked his exam results, she found that Yu's exam marks were very low, ranking bottom in his class. His academic performance had previously been about average, as his class teacher explained.

When I did my first stage fieldwork research with him in May 2008, his school teacher told me that his examination marks had dropped sharply. The longer he stayed in his uncle's home the worse his school performance had become.

"He seldom did his homework this term and often told lies that he'd lost his exercise books or left them at home. He became obsessed by online games in the Cyber Centre. You could find him in some internet bar after school. His uncle never disciplined him, he is too busy. His aunt only cared about her own son. They did not want to spend any time on him. They just provided him with food and shelter."

(Yu's school teacher)

The place where Yu was living was not very quiet or conducive to studying. According to Yu and his mother, Yu was living on the second floor of the building where the restaurant was also located. The restaurant was open from morning until midnight. It was also very noisy in the busy season. Yu felt it difficult to focus on his homework.

“They (customers) laughed and shouted very loud. Some of them even sang songs when they get really drunk. I could hardly absorb any of the words in the book.”

(Yu)

His aunt and uncle did not have time to supervise him or discuss things with his school teacher. Yu had three meals in the restaurant, where he ate with the chefs and waiters. The food did not reach his mother’s expectations, as he was usually given leftovers from the kitchen. Nobody attended his Parent-Teacher meeting. However, his mother usually made several phone calls to his school teacher each term and this continued after she had left. But long-distance discipline of Yu failed. He still stuck to his old ways of playing online games, and did not study hard.

In my second stage research (Jan-March 2009), I distributed the scrapbooks and disposable cameras with my contact details on them. His mother called me before Chinese New Year, and told me of Yu’s recent life and study problems and his reaction to the situation. She also asked me how she might improve his living circumstances. We arranged a face-to-face interview after the New Year.

After New Year in Feb 2009, I talked with Yu’s mother on two occasions (both on the phone and face-to-face). Yu’s mother was most worried about his academic performance. In Sept 2008, he failed to go up a year and stayed in Grade 4 to take the year again. That he came bottom of his school class in the

exams and that it was very rare to obtain such low marks in his class was a source of shame and deep humiliation for his mother. She beat Yu. She also said she regretted and felt guilty for not living with him and looking after him for all those years.

“I did my best to earn money and gave him everything I had but he did not study hard at all. I did not learn a lot in school, so I hoped he could get a better education and have a bright future. ... His school performance was about average before I went to the city. But now it is so poor. I cannot accept that. I called his school teacher. His school teacher suggested that he should be held back in Grade 4 in Sept 2009, so that he could review the knowledge he had not grasped very well. It was losing face. It was disgrace. Few children in primary school are held back. It is my fault as well. I should have been living with him or found somebody who was able to take care of him.”

(Yu's mother)

His teacher confirmed the great efforts made by Yu's mother to assist in his academic achievement and explained why Yu had to be held back a grade.

“His mother called me quite often last year. She knew Yu's situation, his obsession(沉湎) with online games and his poor school performance. But nobody could look after him and keep an eye on him all the time. She asked me whether he could live in my house. I suggested the “surrogate family” to her. ...”

“He did not do his homework at all, nor listen to the teacher. He was always hanging out with bad boys (dropouts) who persuaded him to play online games. Last term, he only got 20% of the full marks, which ranked him bottom of the entire class. Grade 5 is significant to middle

school, if he did it very badly, it would be impossible to catch up with other students in the future. Taking all these things into account, we (teachers) advised that he be held back and his mother took our advice.”

(Yu's school teacher)

Yu did not show his scrapbook or any of the pictures he took, as he said to lose them. He described his 2008 as stressful and terrible.

“Last year (2008), I did not do very well, and got the lowest marks. I want to get better results but I am behind the other students by too much. Nobody helps me with my studies. The teacher did not like me. My aunt and uncle were cold to me. They seldom asked me whether I needed help with my studies.”

(Yu)

He did not want to be held back, because he felt it was shameful. The pressure from the school and his mother made him very depressed. He was disliked by his new classmates. Nobody talked to him or played with him.

“I lost my parents' face. My mother was very angry about that. I feel hopeless. ... I think they (his new classmates) take me as a bad boy who doesn't study hard and always makes trouble. They keep me out of their circle.”

(Yu)

Yu told me that with a very deep and sad voice and with his head down. In China “losing somebody's face” means somebody feels a deep shame. Yu recognised that his being held back a year had brought shame on his parents.

Yu was sent to the surrogate family after Chinese New Year. To make sure Yu got settled his mother delayed the time she went back to the city and visited him every weekend. She was satisfied with the living arrangements and the guardians. When I interviewed her at the final stage of my research (March 2010), she indicated that Yu's school performance was getting better and he was not playing online games anymore. Thanks to his guardians in the surrogate family, his homework was checked and they supervised his study after school.

His school teacher confirmed his progress when I interviewed her. Yu's rank had increased by 10%, from the bottom to slightly below average. His homework was gradually getting better. The guardians in the "surrogate family" attributed the change to the strict regulation in his daily life. A timetable was set up for him by his new guardians. This included when he was to get up, when he should go to bed and his homework or exercise time. He had to go to the caring hostel after school rather than hang out with the "bad boys". At the beginning, he was not used to life in the surrogate family. He asked his mother to let him go back to his uncle's house, but his mother gave him another talking to. After a month, he settled in well and seemed to get on with the other children there. Only when she was sure of this did his mother return to the city.

2009 was a better year for Yu as he made progress in school and made new friends both in school and in the surrogate family. He still hoped that in the future he could live with his parents.

"It is much better than living in my uncle's house. Mrs. Li (his guardians in the caring hostel) is very nice to me. She checks my homework every night and gives me private tuition when I get any study problem. ... The children here are quite friendly. We get up together, go to bed together at the same time and do our homework

together. ... I still miss my parents; I hope we can live together when they get enough money."

(Yu)

Although his mother decided to return and stay at home, Yu still lives in the caring hostel, in the hope of better supervision and living circumstances. His mother thought this specialist support was still necessary as she was not able to take good care of him and supervise his study without his father, who still works in city.

Analysis

As with other left behind children discussed in this chapter, Yu's parents also did their best to compensate for the impact of their migration on their children. In this case the mother's endeavours are more obvious and comprehensive.

The increase in income due to working away means a better material basis for Yu's future education. Yu's parents initially left him behind with his aunt and uncle who run a restaurant. But this arrangement did not meet his mother's expectation. The reverse happened, Yu's school performance dropped and he got into bad habits. Noisy living circumstance, being ignored by his guardians and the encouragement of bad company triggered his school performance to decline sharply and he became obsessed with online games. Telling lies, skipping classes and not finishing his home work became frequent. When the influence of his family decreased, the influence of his school and peer group increased. As time went on, the negative effect culminated in his being held back from advancing to Grade 5.

Under these circumstances, Yu's mother once again made great efforts,

including consulting relevant people, rearranging Yu's living arrangements, delaying her leaving date, and frequent telephone calls to Yu's school teacher and guardians. The negative impact of Yu's parents' migration on him, caused his mother to react by adopting positive strategies to overcome the problems, rather than allowing the situation to get worse. By virtue of her continuing endeavour, his achievements were strengthened.

Yu's previous guardianship not only affected his studies, but also affected the development of his relationships with his classmates and his emotions. What he saw was his emotional response to his parents' migration, his aunt and uncle's apathy, the pressure of being kept back a year and his classmates' contempt, all of which had a concerted effect on him. The second change of living arrangements, to the surrogate house, provided Yu with a better study environment, study supervision, attention and friendship from other children. Thus Yu worked harder in school and stopped his bad habits. His life moved back onto a more favourable track.

Huan's Case

Huan was initially included in this research because she fell within the initial definitions of being "left behind" by both parents. But her living circumstances had changed even at the first stage of the selection of the sample as she was living with one of her biological parents. But this offered an opportunity to explore the impact of changes in family circumstances. Her living arrangements changed on a number of occasions during the course of the research, as did the impact of her parent's migration on her well-being. She was interviewed around Chinese New Year on three occasions between 2008 and 2010. Also interviewed for this research were her teacher (on all three occasions), her

mother (in 2009 and 2010), one of her friend (in 2009) and her paternal grandparents (in 2009). Huan also constructed a scrapbook with photographs and mementos which were also discussed with her in 2009 and 2010. This case study serves to illustrate the complexity of circumstances associated with being left behind and the value of the use of multiple methods in unravelling the impact of the changing circumstances on the well-being of children.

At the time of her initial recruitment, Huan's father worked away from the village on a construction site in a distant city. He had gone to work there in 2007. Huan lived at home in a rural village with her mother and a younger brother. Her mother continued to work in the fields. At the time of the first interview in 2008, Huan was 10 years of age and was very positive about both her schooling and the importance of her family. She was proud of her success at school and ambitious for her future, thinking that she would, in time, become so proficient as an English language speaker that she would be able to travel abroad, and become a teacher of English. Her success at school was also a matter of pride to her family:

"It was last summer, my score in the term exam ranked top (first) in the class. My parents were very glad. My father even took us to a restaurant. I ordered my favourite dish. My parents were very proud of me. I decided to try my best to do better, but last term I did not get top, I only ranked second. My parents did not blame me but I know they were a little bit disappointed. I'm working harder this term."

(Huan)

Her school teacher confirmed that, at this stage, Huan was a very good pupil, hard-working and strong minded, always ranked within the top three in the class for her work and someone who could be trusted to take on responsible roles, such as "monitor" or "house assistant".

Her family was also most important to her, as witnessed by the way in which she constructed a scrapbook, shortly after she had been recruited into the research sample. One of the first things she did was to draw her home with her family (mother, father and little brother) in front of the house. Also prominent in the scrapbook were photographs of her mother and herself as a baby and again at the age of four with her mother, together with other children. The mother-daughter relationship was particularly important, with the two of them being prioritised for the front page of the scrapbook.

But Huan was also aware from the outset that this family base was fragile and vulnerable. Upon being praised for her drawing of the family home, she became tearful about it, explaining that her father had recently returned home from work in the city with a deep scar on his face. This had increased the anxiety her mother felt at being left at home without him. As Huan explained, after he went away to work, her mother cried every night and seemed to lose her temper and get angry much more easily than she had before. Her school teacher had also noticed changes in Huan after her father left:

“She was fine just after her father left. She studied and played with friends as usual. But after (about) half a year, she seemed to be less happy than before and always sighed. She worked hard, you can see that. But more mistakes appeared in her school work and homework. Obviously something distracted her.”

Things became more strained and difficult during the winter, when Huan’s father returned home with a broken leg following an accident at work and was confined to bed for several weeks. Huan’s school teacher had been a classmate of her mother and enquired about what was going wrong. Her mother explained to Huan’s school teacher that she had talked with Huan

about mistakes in her school work and punished her for such silly mistakes; but she also thought that Huan had been affected by a second accident to her father at work and being confined to bed until the break mended. This meant that the family was reviewing the stressed situation, which again added to the anxiety felt by Huan As her mother told the school teacher:

“Teacher reporting a conversation with Huan’s mother: She told me how hard the work Huan’s father did in the city was, and how hard the life she led was. She had to look after two children as well as their chickens and pigs.... Last winter her father broke his leg. Huan’s school performance was not as good as before and this bad accident affected her studies.”

Huan confirmed that the accident had worried her considerably:

“It was before this Chinese New Year, my father came back home with a broken leg because of an accident at his construction site. Although it was not serious, my father spent a month in bed and we spent a very sad Chinese New Year. As soon as my father recovered he went back there (the city). My mother cried a lot in the evening. She was so sad but (tried to) hide that from me. I know she was worried about my father.”

The teacher also learned that Huan’s mother was considering moving to the city with her husband leaving both Huan and her brother to be looked after by their grandparents.

“I heard that her mother planned to join her father in the migrant’s city. She has a little brother as well. I am not sure who is going to look after them. They have grandparents on both sides who are living in the

village. It is easier for them to help each other to take care of the grandchildren.”

Between the second and third interviews (2009-10), Huan’s mother did move to the city and the children were looked after by their paternal grandparents. The grandparents were quite old and Huan found she had many additional caring tasks to fulfil. These included additional housework, looking after her young brother and looking after her grandmother when she was ill. Although Huan tried to keep up with her school work, her teacher began to notice changes in Huan’s behaviour which suggested that things were not as well as they might seem to be.

“She still works hard - even harder than before. And her school performance is ranked in the top 3 again. At the beginning of her mother’s migration, she is not like the other left-behind-children. She is not sad and lonely. She seems to be happy, not happy, how do you say ‘not unhappy’. She is monitor of her class, gets on well with other girls, but does not play with them a lot like she used to do. She has a little brother to look after. Her grandparents cannot manage all the work all the time. Her grandmother has suffered from a heart condition for many years. Her grandfather’s health is not good either. They are nice people and treat their grandchildren very well and used to give her mother a hand when she was at home.”

(Huan’s school teacher)

By the third round of interviews in 2010, Huan’s mother says she is concerned.

“I was worried about her studies. Before I went away, the girl’s marks dropped. But they are okay now. My in-laws are in their 60s and they cannot take good care of them. My daughter shoulder’s some of the

burden i.e. she feeds the chickens, washes the dishes, and washes her own and her little brother's clothes. When my mother in law was ill in hospital, Huan's aunty cooked lunch for them and Huan had to re-heat the left-overs for breakfast and supper. I never let her touch the fire before."

(Huan's mother)

Huan herself did not talk in interviews about any discontent with her new home circumstances. Although there has been quite a significant re-structuring of her home life, this is not represented in the way in which she presents things in her scrapbook. She does include one photograph of her mother, her brother and another cousin taken over the New Year period, but the other photographs she presented were all focused on her school life. These included a photograph of the head-teacher, her classmates, and the school building itself. Perhaps most poignant of all, she included a bus-ticket used by her parents from the village to the railway which took them away to the city. She explained that she had to keep in mind the possibility that she too had to find a way to join them in a future away from the village, if only her school work would qualify her to leave as well.

However, by March 2010 things had declined further and Huan, although taller, looked thinner than when I had seen her the year before. Her teacher was concerned about her exam marks getting worse, but explained it was much harder for her now there was no-one to supervise her after school. She also spent much more time on domestic work at home. But what had upset Huan the most was having her first period in October 2009. Unaware that this was about to happen to her, and oblivious to it being normal in girls of her age, the teacher had been the first adult to be consulted. Huan had initially asked for leave because of stomach ache which her teacher had granted, thinking it was because of something she had eaten. Initially, Huan herself was also very

frightened, as she explained:

“I was very scared and did not know what to do. I asked my best friend, if she knew how to deal with it. She said no and told me I might have a very bad disease. I knew my mother’s phone number but I never called her before, as she was very busy in the daytime. My grandmother was in the hospital again so the only person I could turn to is Mrs. Zhang (her teacher).”

Huan returned to school and to her teacher, embarrassed, worried and full of shame as her teacher explained:

“After a while she came back with an embarrassed and upset face. I asked her what had happened. She told me her problem shamefully. I comforted her and told her that it was common in girls who were growing up. I then bought her some sanitary towels. As far as I am concerned she is the first girl in the class and nobody knew what was wrong. ... I informed her mother about the whole thing.”

When interviewed later, at Chinese New Year, Huan’s mother said she felt terribly sorry about it all. She wished she could be at home and give her sufficient help. But she also remained worried about her schooling as this was a crucial year for Huan who was due to transfer to middle school. Getting into a good school would be very important to her future. Huan herself was also worried, reporting that she found it increasingly difficult to focus on her studies as she was often tired. She reported that she had fallen asleep in one lesson, something which had not happened before. Her helplessness at her first period had also proved symbolic to her.

“My mum asked me why I had not called her. I said, ‘You have to work.

I do not want to disrupt you'. I am over it now. But I envy the girls whose mothers stay at home with them. Those mums could supervise their homework and help them with 'girl's things'."

(Huan)

Analysis

Behind this simple narrative are several important issues to emphasise. First, being a left-behind child is a complex process which changes over time. It is not simply one event, the effect of which can be measured on the social equivalent of the Richter Scale. Being left-behind changes for Huan, from her father leaving home and her mother's emotional response to this, to the gradual recognition of the danger of his work, to her mother joining him and living away from the village, to the increased pressure of domestic work for her grandparents, to the isolation and loneliness of experiencing her first menstrual cycle which, in ignorance of what was happening, she found frightening.

In contrast to Cheng, Xin and Yu, Huan is a highly intelligent and talented pupil who is very committed to her studies. She recognises some of the positives of her father working away from the village. He provides money for the family to survive economically, to help to pay school fees and enable herself and (later) her little brother to do as well as they can at school. This is the means through which her generation can share the prosperity which comes with migration from rural villages. So to her academic skills she has to add an emotional maturity which balances danger to her father, and sadness and loss of her mother, with opportunities in the future for herself.

Second, as with the other cases discussed, the status of being left-behind changes over time for Huan. Initially, when her father left to work in the city,

she seems to survive quite successfully, although not being quite the star she was aged 13. But by the end of the story when she is living with her grandparents, we are being shown evidence of her fatigue, decline in school performance, and the impact of the separation from her mother on everyday survival skills. Perhaps because mother and daughter have been so close, Huan misses her mother more and more, but also in different sorts of ways. The various facets of “loss” and the extra burdens of the different domestic circumstances, thus have a cumulative effect upon her well-being.

Third, the impact of being left behind is cumulative and develops a “trajectory” through which incidents and the responses of people to individual incidents build up a momentum for change which is difficult to resist or deflect. Huan and her family members were very confident about her academic achievements before her father’s departure. However, with the separation from both her parents, one after the other, her school performance dropped from few mistakes in her homework, to the loss of rank in the class, to the worry about the possibility of upgrading to a better middle school. These series of changes are remarkable on account of the negative consequences of her parents’ migration. Her fatigue in school because of extra domestic activities and lack of supervision from her paternal grandparents contributed to the decline of her academic achievement. In contrast to Cheng, Xuan and Yu, Huan undertook more housework. This may be partly due to her location in a remote village and partly because of her gender; left-behind girls do, and are expected to do, more housework compared to left-behind boys. On the other hand, the deep concern about her father’s safety, missing her mother and the helplessness and panic at her first menstruation also distracted her from her studies.

Fourthly, it is important to note the importance of the use of multiple methods in unravelling these relationships. Through the employment of longitudinal research methods and visual methods such as the scrapbook, the various

relationships, including mother-daughter, peers etc., unfolded gradually through the ongoing research process. The mother-daughter photos on the front page of her scrapbook seem to indicate that the two of them used to be very close. However, after the separation from her mother, her mother's role had to be taken by other people such as the teacher and her friends. These changes were illustrated by the narratives from different individuals at different stages and the photos she took of her teacher and her friends. Other mementos, such as the bus tickets, linked her and her parents, the village and the city and her past and future. None of this could have been revealed by using simple "question and answer" methods of enquiry.

Conclusions

This chapter presented four case studies through which I have examined the nature and impact of being left behind as a child in rural China, when both parent migrate to find work. The examination of the cases has enabled us to develop a detailed appreciation of what is involved in the phenomenon of left-behind-children, and the difficulties involved in assessing its effect on the well-being of children. In this final section some of the main elements of the analytical framework developed in this chapter are summarised and a number of unresolved questions are raised, so as to inform a more focused interrogation of the data in the next chapter, which expands the analysis to include the other cases covered by the research.

Firstly, and of paramount importance to this thesis is the recognition that being left behind is a complex process rather than a homogenous event. It happens differently for different children and the circumstances of their parents' leaving, and the alternative care arrangements in which they are left differ widely. This

calls into question previous studies which simply compare the circumstances of left-behind and not-left-behind children, as if they were two discrete and mutually exclusive states. The case studies bear testimony to the wide differences in the way in which being left behind takes place. Related to this is the recognition that leaving a child behind as a consequence of economic migration involves parents in complex judgements, decisions and reviews of these decisions, as they attempt to balance priorities in the pursuit of enhancing the well-being of their family. They do not simply or callously leave. Parents agonise about difficult choices and review the impact these have on their children, as they watch from a distance to gauge the impact their decisions may have had. As some of the case studies also illustrate, this process is not always a linear one. Some parents return to live with their children in rural villages, even though their relationship may have been changed by their initial migration, or affected by the new circumstances of their return.

The perspective of treating being left behind as a process, whilst important in shaping the research project overall, still has some unanswered questions which will need to be addressed in the next stage of our analysis. The case studies presented so far suggest that the key figure in both decision-making and reviewing the impact of decisions is the child's mother. This needs to be reviewed against other cases, with careful scrutiny being given to the role of the father in the decisions about migration, what the alternatives are, and his importance in reviewing the impact of migration on the left-behind-child. There are also hints within the four cases considered so far about tensions between not only the child-parent generation, but also between the parent-grandparent generation. Important questions remain about the way in which grandparents view the economic migration of their sons and daughters, and how they feel about the weight of responsibility they are asked to bear for their grandchildren. There is unlikely to be a single answer to these questions, but it is important to

ask them, as this may throw light on changing attitudes to family responsibility and how economic change is impacting upon multi-generational solidarities in rural China.

The second major point of note is that being left behind involves the parent in negotiating (and in some cases re-negotiating) a new care arrangement for their child. The case studies have shown that the range of choices is significant, from care by grandparents (both paternal and maternal) to care by uncles and aunts, through to the use of a surrogate family, a form of professional (in the sense of being paid for) surrogate care. The cases have also illustrated how these choices are reviewed and may change over time as the impact of the initial arrangement is reviewed by the parent(s). What is important to review in subsequent chapters is the range of alternatives which are considered, and what elements of the care of the children parents seem to think of as the most important in reaching their judgements. How is the success of these arrangements assessed? What are their sources of knowledge, advice and support as they reach difficult decisions? This is particularly important in examining those parents who resort to professional surrogate care, something which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

The third set of factors to be built into the analysis concerns how parents monitor their children and their well-being whilst they are away. Some of this is determined by the accessibility of the mail service, telephones or the internet. But the content of communication with their children also provides indicators as to their main concerns for their children, how they seek to compensate their children for their absence, or seek to demonstrate the potential benefits to the child of their economic migration, and how they respond when the news from home does not seem to be good.

The fourth set of factors relates to the range of different dimensions through

which being left behind is perceived to impact upon the child. On the basis of the four case studies discussed so far, these seem to span (at least) four dimensions of well-being:

- Material well-being, food, shelter, cleanliness;
- Care, supervision and support (including discipline). This might include supervision of everything from homework to personal hygiene, as well as the monitoring of the child's use of time and patterns of association;
- Emotional stability (including feelings of loneliness and abandonment, anger and resentment, lack of a confidant (closeness with a special adult) or someone who treats them as special and with whom they can share aspirations for their future);
- Educational development (doing well, or well-enough, at school so as to promote the future economic aspirations of the child).

These four dimensions were clearly manifest in the case studies so far discussed. But it is important that, in the more extensive analysis in the next chapter to be vigilant for the importance of others. Based on other (Western) analyses of child well-being, there might also be concerns about child safety and child health.

The four case studies also suggest that an assessment of the first dimension "care, supervision and support" is also linked to issues concerning the discipline (including beating) of the child. Given this, it will also be important to review how this is considered "legitimate" by the child, parents, and guardians and whether it is an appropriate element of a caring relationship.

The sixth major element of the perspective and analytical framework being developed here concerns how the impact of being left behind seems to change over time. Some of this, of course, relates to aspects of the process of being

left behind which also varies through time. So, for instance, changes in the type of surrogate care are important in the cases of Cheng, Xin and Yu. Huan also experiences significant change when her mother leaves to live away from home. But what is also noticeable about Huan's story is the delayed effect of her father's migration, and how her fear of him coming to harm and her mother's worries and upset at her separation from him, has a cumulative effect upon her abilities to concentrate at school. Although this is intensified when her mother leaves and she has additional caring responsibilities for her grandparents, Huan's story does suggest that, in interrogating other cases, there should be vigilance as to whether the impact of being left behind may occur in stages, with each successive one intensifying a downward spiral.

It was argued earlier that being left behind is not a singular event and that its negative impact should not be regarded as necessarily linear, because it can be reversed or ameliorated. However, equally there is a need to be vigilant as to whether the cumulative effects of disadvantage may also have 'tipping points' or 'points of no return', as educational underperformance produces missed opportunities for school transfer or examination success.

In the examination of how the impact of being left behind changes over time, there are other questions which need to be addressed in the more extensive case examination. These include the following:

- What are perceived by children's parents to be the main indicators of a decline in well-being?
- Is educational success taken as a primary indicator by everyone or do different people (teachers, guardians, parents and children themselves) regard different indicators as important?
- How do children self-monitor how they have been affected by their parent(s) leaving?

A seventh issue concerns whether there are characteristics of the child being left behind which impact on the decision making of the parents. The case studies raise some important issues in this regard, not least of which concerns Huan, who differs from the other three cases in being both female and educationally talented and markedly successful prior to her parent(s) migration. There are hints too that, as the only female case study she may have responded to the dangers her father faced in a different way to the male case studies. Furthermore, when she was finally left with her grandparents she seemed to be required to do more agricultural and domestic work than boys left in similar situations. This again raises the question as to whether the experience of being left behind is different for girls than boys. Their decline may also involve different aspects of behaviour and indicate different manifestations of a decline in their well-being, with suggestions that boys may act out their distress in forms of violence, anti-social behaviour and addiction more than their female counter-parts.

Other individual characteristics of the children may also be important and this will be examined through the other cases to be considered in the next chapter. Before the migration of her parent(s) Huan was top of the class and her parents were obviously very proud of her success and promise for the future. The negative impact of her parent's absence was that she lost this pre-eminence. On the other hand, Cheng, Yu, Xin were of below average or average ability. But Yu in particular experienced shame and humiliation when he went from average to very poor and was held back a grade at school. There may also be differences between children who continue to live in their home rural villages compared to those who live in larger communities and towns.

Finally, the analysis of the four cases in this chapter has vindicated the use of multiple methods and a longitudinal perspective in exploring the complex processes of being left behind. This use of a different methodological approach

to the examination of the issue has allowed the development of a new and different analytical framework, which has brought fresh and different insights to the processes of being left behind to the static, correlation-based, approaches which relied upon survey methods, as reviewed in Chapter 2. The data produced by these methods will continue to be used in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 the Analysis of Further Cases and Other Data

Introduction

Some of the case studies considered in the last chapter illustrate that parents of left-behind children do not leave them without careful consideration of the options they have available. They show how decisions were constantly under review and many parents changed their minds about what was best for their child. This chapter examines a range of questions about the processes of decision making and reviewing. It is based on nine cases, studied through all three stages of the longitudinal research, using interviews conducted with the left-behind children, their guardians, their parents and their school teachers. It also includes data from the questionnaire survey conducted with 35 left-behind children.

Parents consider different options, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of their choices and reviewing the impact these have on their children; from questions such as whether to leave the children at home and who the children should live with at home, before they move away to work, to *how are the children coping?* and *how is the guardianship working out?* after they have moved away. This process is not always a linear one and the arrangements are not always the best solution neither is that always the matter settled once and for all. This chapter will focus on five key questions. Firstly, it looks at the reasons why parents leave their children at home and decide not to take them when they migrate. It is argued that some of the most pertinent factors concern the structures within which such decisions are made, rather

than personal or individual factors. A number of these structural constraints will be outlined and further examined in terms of policy making towards the end of the chapter. Secondly, the chapter examines the factors which appear important in choosing a particular form of arrangements for the guardianship of a child. Thirdly, it considers how parents review their first and any subsequent decisions. What factors are taken into account when assessing the impact of living and care arrangements on the well-being of their child? Fourthly, it examines how parents monitor their children's well-being from a distance. Lastly, the chapter focuses on the impact of specific arrangements on the well-being of the left-behind children and other relevant social groups.

Why are the Children Left Behind?

For all the parents of left behind children, the decision process in leaving their children at home revealed the difficult decisions they had faced. Most parents of left-behind children wished their children could live with them. If the circumstances allowed, they would take their children with them to the city rather than leaving them behind in their home town or village. The deep feelings of missing and worrying about their children do not seem to be diluted over time. However, reality forced them to make difficult decisions, which they found very difficult to make. By examining the factors that affected the parents' decision-making, a better understand of why the children in this study were left behind can be gained.

Structural Constraints

The Occupation of Migrant Parents

One of the most important factors guiding the decisions of the parents in this study was the nature of their work in the migrant cities. For most of them this was a practical matter: whether enough time was available for them to take care of their children; whether proper and suitable accommodation was available for their children; and, whether their income could cover all the expenses involved in living in the city and providing for the welfare of the whole family in the future. The characteristics of their work determined both their quality of life and that of their children in urban communities. Among the 35 left-behind children covered by this research, over 80% of their fathers were working as construction workers or decorators. Ninety percent of their mothers were working as shop assistants or house servants. Of those who participated in the more intensive qualitative interviews, all nine of them worked more than 12 hours per day and reported that this was “extremely tiring”. The nature of their work meant, therefore, that they would have little time to look after children.

“I work from 8am to 8pm, and with one hour break at noon. His father works more hours than me. I don’t think we would have any time to look after Jun if he lived with us.”

(Jun’s mother)

Fei’s parents who sold fruit in Beijing reported that they were even busier:

“We get up at four in the morning and go to the wholesale fruit market, and then replenished our stock. It is almost night-time when we close up. We worked till midnight during the Games.”

The second issue they faced was the location of their work, which was not always fixed. Moving around between different addresses was a common thing for them. When parents spoke about making decisions, the features of their job (or potential job) played a significant role in the process.

“Initially, we planned to take Jingjing with us. She is an only child. We wanted to look after her ourselves. However, my friends who were working there, and got us the jobs, warned us that we would probably not have time to cook for her. We had to work from 6 am to 6 pm, with half an hour break at noon. We were not worried about her meals. We could make more food in advance, but we did not have time to take and pick her up after school. There is too a lot of traffic and I was afraid she would get knocked down by the vehicles. I also heard that some children were abducted and sold whilst separated from their parents. So I gave up the idea.”

(Jingjing’s mother)

Without exception, the parents in this research had their children’s safety as their paramount concern. In their opinion, compared to their rural homes, the urban communities presented them with considerably more potential risks. The amount of cars, large numbers of immigrants and the cultural diversity of the urban communities meant that they thought their children were potentially open to a lot more risks. Thus, for the sake of the children’s well-being, parents chose to leave them behind.

“We did not know our neighbours; some of them did illegal things. I saw a girl bring a lot of men back home at different times, and the couple next door sold pirate discs. The neighbours aren’t simple. It would have a negative influence on Jie if he was exposed to it.”

(Jie’s mother)

Lele's mother had a poor impression about drivers in the city areas, so she did not want to take Lele with her:

"The drivers are mad there. They don't care about pedestrians. I was injured by a car when crossing the road. Maybe it was my fault but the driver should have been more cautious. It wouldn't happen in the countryside. So I won't let my daughter live here when she is still so young."

(Lele's mother)

As far as some parents were concerned, the instability and changeability of their work also went against their children's development. If the children were living with them. Guang's parents changed their jobs several times, even when they had found a settled job, they still needed to move around.

"We just took on this job last summer and moved out from the apartment we rented last spring. My husband has changed work place several times since he went there (city). We do not want our son to move all the time. He needs a stable life and to go to a (the same) primary school. Otherwise he would have to change schools every time we moved. It is not good for his schooling. So we left him with his grandparents. It is difficult for all of them (grandparents and children). But we could not think of a better solution."

(Guang's mother)

Lv (2007) suggested that, generally speaking, self-employed adults, who usually have a comparatively steady work location and living space, are more likely to take their children with them than employed labour, such as construction workers, decorators, or restaurant workers such as waiters. Employed labourers often do not have fixed employment and are likely to

change jobs at least once within the space of six months. The turbulence of their work resulted in the instability of their living arrangements, as most of them lived in accommodation owned and controlled by their employers. Therefore, any instability in their employment had consequences for their living arrangements. If they lost their job they also would lose their home. This instability further restricted their opportunities to take the children with them.

"Our house is not a proper house. There isn't a bathroom and or toilet, just a bedroom and a kitchen. There isn't any room for even a small desk. How could Fei do his homework?"

(Fei's mother)

"The boss just provided one room for us. We didn't have enough money to rent a flat or an apartment."

(Jun's mother)

The Economic Status of the Household

Even if they have stable work and accommodation, parents do not necessarily have the financial resources to support their children's schooling and life in the city. The average household income of the parents is 2,000 Yuan per month (equivalent to around £200); after deducting their living expenses including rent, bills and travel costs (about 1,200 Yuan per month), the remainder would hardly cover the cost of child care and schooling. The fees charged for schooling in the city would also be considerably more, because they are usually registered as rural residents. To pay city-based school fees would, therefore, compromise their ability to be able to afford higher education fees in the future. Even if they could afford all the children's higher school fees, they would not be able to save any money for the future and their children's higher education. After making such calculations, most parents gave up the thought of taking their children with them to the city.

"We do not make big money there. A thousand Yuan doesn't go anywhere there. We can live on steamed bread (a kind of Chinese food) but he (her son) can't. He needs meat and vegetables which are much cheaper at home. The better school, close to us will charge you 10,000 yuan if you are in their catchment area. We'd rather save the money and spend it on his college."

(Qiang's mother)

Low income and high living expenses also influenced parents' decision. Most parents described their financial situation as "can't afford ...", "not enough money to ...", "we make no money". These expressions indicate the migrant labourers' low income and insecure economic status, which is part of the explanation for the phenomenon of left-behind children. Jingjing's mother summed this up in her own words:

"If you don't have money, do not take your children with you. They don't belong there. They can lead a better life at home."

Entitlement to Schooling

The differences between the education system in the migrant cities and in rural areas also seemed to make a difference. Hong had attended primary school for one year in her parents' host city. But after she completed the fifth year, she had to repeat the fifth year in her original school in her home village. When asked why, her mother explained with regret:

"We saved some money during these years and set up our own fruit shop. We wanted Hong to have a better education, but she did not have a local household registration. If she wanted to go to a civil-run school, we had to pay very high registration fees. The private schools

for migrant children were in very poor condition. They changed teachers nearly every two month. Even if we could afford the registration fee for the local school, Hong was not allowed to take the examination to go to middle school. She told us that the teachers were worse than the teachers in our village school, and the textbooks were different. So we sent her back home.”

However, parents often did not reach a final or binding decision at the beginning of their migration; they often changed their minds about things as they learned more and more about the circumstances in which they all found themselves. Due to more stable accommodation and better income, Hong’s parents thought it a good idea to enhance their daughter’s well-being by bringing her to the city. However, things didn’t turn out as they had hoped, as a result of issues surrounding her schooling.

For a long time, education policies in China have been “city-oriented,” in that social resources are allocated unequally and the majority of high quality educational resources are concentrated in cities. This has already led to a tremendously uneven development in basic education and to a huge gap in the conditions in schools in different areas (Chan et al, 2008). Most urban schools are regulated by the state, but rural schools are run by local (county level) government (Chan et al, 2008). The systems of management of the two types are not the same, and the financial support for the different schools also comes from different places. Elementary schools in the cities are under the Bureau of Education, which supports the schools by supplying teachers and financial assistance. In rural areas, teachers are enrolled by the county and there is no financial investment from the state. County residents support their own teachers and teaching facilities (Chan et al, 2008).

Also of importance is that not all children are entitled to enjoy the highly qualified teachers and teaching facilities in state schools. Before 2006, as a result of the household registration system, migrant children were not able to obtain local government education. Their parents had to pay extra registration fees to get school places for their children in the migrant city. In contrast to their household income (40,000-50,000 Yuan) the cost of schooling (20,000-30,000 Yuan) was very expensive; because of this, some migrant workers sent their children back home or simply did not send their children to school at all. Some private schools were also established specifically to meet the needs of migrant children. However, as Hong's mother indicated, these schools are not well equipped and suffered as a result of the lack of qualified teachers and adequate access to financial aid.

The format of textbooks is also different between schools in cities and in the countryside. Sometimes, the children who returned home to rural villages or adjacent towns in order to progress to middle school found difficulty in catching up with other students in the same year. Therefore, some returning children had to be held back a year. This further exacerbated the plight of left-behind children whose parents made an attempt to be re-united with them in the city. The experiences of migration with their parents widened the child's field of vision, enriched their knowledge and deepened their understanding of their parents' life in the city. On the other hand, when with reluctance, they returned to their hometown, this could arouse a feeling of rejection that would influence their entire life. Hong, for instance, described her understanding of her parents and her aspirations in the following terms:

"I was very happy to live with my parents, even (though) life was tough there. My parents tried their best to send me to state-regulated school, but failed. I attended two private schools for migrant children. They were not proper schools. I had to go home to take the examination for

middle school... When my parents told me that, I was very sad and cried, but we had no choice. That was not the place for me. I'll go and find a good job there when I grow up."

Changing Opportunity-Structures

As well as the constraints described above, a number of new opportunities for parents are beginning to emerge. These offer different forms of surrogate care and supervision for children left behind in rural areas and adjacent towns. An increasing number of parents with a relatively good income are beginning to send their children to schools in the town, which are considered to be better than the schools in their home village. The cost of such schools is also much lower than urban schools. Some children who have transferred to town schools live with family members who live in the town. Others live in *surrogate families*, where adults have set themselves up as surrogate parents to offer accommodation and care for left-behind children. The parents of other children made arrangements for their child to live with and be looked after by a teacher.

The Surrogate Family

Most surrogate families where left-behind children lived were run by people who were formerly teachers. The children's parents seemed to trust their ability to look after the children, supervise their study and discipline their behaviour. They accommodated between 15 and 20 children in each house. The owners arranged the children's time-tables and gave the children supervision, including adequate time for their homework. Some offered specialist help in particular subjects. For instance, in Hong's surrogate house, Mrs. Li supervised mathematics and her husband supervised Chinese. They employ an English teacher to supervise their English twice a week. After the children had joined them, they initially made telephone calls to the children's parents every week

and reported on various aspects of the children's life to them. Most of the surrogate families in this town followed a similar pattern. Not all the children living in the surrogate families are left-behind children, some of them are children who used to live in a village ten miles away from the town, but their parents wanted them to go to better primary schools, so they sent their children to the town whilst they stayed at home living in the village. Thus, this kind of surrogate parenting has become increasingly popular, not only for parents involved in economic migration, but also parents wanting to promote the educational advancement of their children; because of this, they are regarded as positive institutions and of high status.

School Teachers as Guardians and Supervisors

Some school teachers also get involved in similar arrangements, but in a smaller way. Compared to surrogate families, *teachers as guardians* only host a couple of students. The children usually live with the teachers and their family members. Due to the small size of the enterprise, the teacher seldom needs to hire other teachers to help with the work. They supervise the additional study of all subjects themselves.

Some teachers also work as supervisors or tutors after school, without this involving residence with them. The parents pay small amounts of money to the teacher to provide this service. According to the parents' wishes, the teacher might give private tuition or just provide the child with a good studying environment (like a reading room) and occasional extra support. When supervising studies, teachers may either go to the child's house or ask the children to go to their own house, when they supervise their study.

More and more teachers are taking part in this money-making activity, although strictly speaking, this kind of part-time job is not allowed by school regulations. This is because they might have less time and energy for their teaching job and

the extra work they take on may affect the quality of their teaching. On the other hand, teachers working in this way are offering an important service to left-behind children and their guardians who, because the parents are working away, can afford to pay for the service. The responses of teachers to these new opportunities are explored in more detail towards the end of the chapter.

Both *surrogate families* and *teachers as guardians* have emerged in town areas and villages which are relatively undeveloped and remote. However, in rural area where there are a lot of left-behind children, there are the beginnings of more comprehensive policies to help them.

Policy Implications and Policy Development

With the increase of left-behind children, the government has called on school teachers and other people to pay more attention to them (Jiang & Peng, 2006; Mo & Li, 2008; Lu & Lu, 2009, Sun & Shi, 2008). Therefore, many activities such as *one-to-one supervision* have been set up. This involves a school teacher or volunteer helping one left-behind child. The school teachers and the volunteers take responsibility for the left-behind child's well-being, school performance and behaviour. They should be fully acquainted with the left-behind child's family background, their thinking and behaviour and their school performance. The recommendation is that teachers and volunteers should telephone the left-behind child's parents once a month, write to them once a term and visit their home at least once a year (Sun & Shi, 2008). Some organisations have called for both financial and non-financial donations for left-behind children. Books and clothes, as well as money are given to the left-behind children who need it (Lu, 2009).

Decisions about Guardianship

The process of deciding on guardianship is interlaced with the parents' expectations, judgements and understanding of both traditional ideas and their own particular circumstances. It should also be recognised at the outset that the arrangements they first try to establish are not necessarily a once and for all solution. They could also re-arrange accommodation for their children after they had left them behind. There seem to be three main factors influencing parents' decisions about their children's living arrangements.

Traditional ideas

Usually, grandparents are the first option to take over responsibility. Eighty percent of the parents tended to ask their own parents (the children's grandparents) for help when considering their children's living arrangements. This was especially the case when the migration took place from the proximity of an extended family. To many Chinese families it seemed the natural choice to leave the children with the older generation in their home village or town.

"Our home is their (in-laws) home. We didn't bothered to send Jun anywhere else. They knew each other very well."

(Jun's mother)

Apart from parents, grandparents are the closest people to the children. Grandparents usually have the motivation to look after their grandchildren well, because of the emotional bond. Parents are also more likely to trust their own parents to do their best for their children's well-being. In China, the younger generation carry on their father's family name. In the fieldwork site, some children are called X's children (family name) by their neighbours. However,

maternal grandparents are not necessarily considered as the children's family or family members that should support each other when in need.

"Her paternal grandmother looked after her for five years before she started school. My mother is looking after my brother's son."

(Lele's mother)

It is common for the grandparent's to support their son and his wife in the care of their children, even when they live in the village. The change of guardianship from parents to grandparents is almost taken for granted when parents leave their children behind.

The Ability of the Guardians

When considering a suitable placement for their child, the second thing that parents were concerned about was with the guardians' health and capabilities. They also hoped the guardians would be able to provide their children with enough food and shelter, a clean living environment and promises to keep the child safe. Thus, the physical health of the potential guardian was of great importance, so that the parents could assess how they would be able to deal with all the extra work involved. Having a basic level of education was also considered a priority, so that they would be able to help a child who may have difficulties with their school work. The guardians' ability to tutor the children's study and check their homework was often taken into account as an important consideration. For some parents, the health or abilities of their own parents precluded them leaving their child with them.

"Both my parents and in-laws are very weak. They even need each other's help with their life."

(Hong's mother)

"They (paternal grandparents) are not able to assist him with his homework nor check it."

(Qiang's mother)

Availability

The parents in this research study tended to leave their children either in their home district or send them to live in a nearby town. If the ideal guardians (grandparents on either side) were too far away, they would have to choose an alternative. Parents would not want to add an extra burden to old people who need to do their own farm work or have other grandchildren to attend to.

"My parents are living in S which is a thousand miles away from here. My in-laws are living with my brother-in-law and looking after his two kids. It is no good use for us to put bring forward this request. So we turned to my aunt."

(Jie's mother)

How Do Parents Review their Decision?

After taking various factors into account, parents left their children with the guardians they chose. However, this did not mean the children's life with their guardians came up to their expectations in every respect. When parents were

questioned about how they felt about their children's life, some parents had serious doubts. A number of factors seemed to be important to them. The majority of parents seemed to hold a positive attitude toward the guardians of their children when I first interviewed them. They appeared, on first sight, to show very little discontent. However, on closer inspection, "polite but neutral" statements of "satisfaction" may have been influenced by trust not having yet been established between the researcher and the respondent. Phrases akin to "fine" or "not bad" were the most frequently used words.

"My in-laws are very nice people. My children are fine with them."

(Jun's mother - 1st interview February 2009) *"Her paternal grandmother takes good care of her. We have set our heart minds at rest."*

(Jingjing's mother - 1st interview February 2009)

However, parents tended to have an even higher opinion of any second arrangement they made, having changed their minds about the appropriateness of the first arrangement.

"Mrs Zhang (his teacher) is very good at looking after children. My child's school performance has improved and is much better than when he was living with his grandparents."

(Qiang's mother- 2nd interview February 2010)

By the third stage of the research, when there was more trust between researcher and respondent, many parents were more critical of their children's guardian. Jun's mother pointed out every aspect that she was not happy about, from everyday life to education.

"They (his paternal grandparents) spoiled him. They let him watch TV for the whole evening. They seldom checked his school work, nor contacted his teachers. His clothing was not clean enough. They took him to the public shower room once a month!"

(Jun's mother- 2nd interview February 2010)

Extra housework made Jingjing's mother worried about her daughter:

They (paternal grandparents) did not know how to supervise her study. When they were busy Jingjing had to give them a hand."

(Jingjing's mother 2nd interview February 2010)

Qiang's mother expressed her discontent about the teacher who looked after him as well:

"His teacher used to focus more on Qiang. But this year she spent less-and-less time on him. Qiang told us she was busy with her work, she wanted to get promotion the following term and had more left-behind children to look after. I can feel the drop in his discipline."

(Qiang's mother-2nd interview February 2010)

Jie's mother even thought of changing his guardianship because of the negative consequences:

"My aunt didn't want to look after him anymore. She said he made too much trouble for them. She was tired of disciplining him. So I sent him to his teacher's home. The price is quite high, higher than other surrogate houses. But his teacher suggested to us that we send him to her house. We thought we'd better take the advice otherwise she would treat him no better than before at school."

(Jie's mother- 2nd interview February 2010)

Criteria Used by Parents in Judging the Guardians

A number of methods seemed to be used in evaluating how successful a particular guardianship was proving to be. Parents had their own observations of changes in their child's behaviour as well as teachers' feedback, and comments from the guardians and other related people. Parents also had more specific criteria that they used in evaluating the success of the guardians' work.

School performance

Left-behind children's academic achievements seemed to be the paramount thing which parents were concerned about. Education receives great attention from most Chinese parents. They placed greater emphasis on the child's school performance especially when they could not monitor other aspects of their child's behaviour for themselves. Exam results especially were taken as the most important factors as indicative of this. Jun's mother is typical of parent in her concern about his performance:

"I am worried about Jun's schooling. His marks dropped sharply this term. He didn't pass maths! His grandparents didn't check his school work at all."

(Jun's mother 2nd interview Feb 2010)

For some parents, poor school performance by their child meant that they began to seriously review the impact of their migration:

"Jingjing's teacher told me that her school performance was not as good as before. I am thinking of returning home and taking care of her. Her grandparents aren't able to supervise her homework."

(Jingjing's mother - 2nd interview Feb 2010.)

It is often used as a sign that they have, or have not, made the right decision about who should be their child's guardian:

"Mrs. Zhang (his teacher) is very good at looking after children. My child's school performance is improved and much better than when he was living with his grandparents."

(Qiang's mother- 2nd interview Feb 2010)

"Hong used to study well before she migrated with us. But her schooling broke down because of the new school system. When she returned home she repeated the year. She is better off with Mrs. Zhang. We do not need to be worried about her studies. Mrs. Li rings us if anything goes wrong. Her school teacher gives her very good comments."

(Hong's mother)

Daily life

Despite the primacy of school performance, parents were also concerned about other aspects of their child's daily life including their food, clothing, access to pocket money, involvement in (too much) housework, and use of leisure time. Fei's mother seemed most concerned about her diet and its impact on her physical condition:

"Fei lost some weight last year. I asked my mother-in-law to cook some meat for her. She promised. But she seldom cooked meat. I know she wants to save money. Fei eats potato and cabbage all the time. I cooked lots of meat when I returned home."

(Fei's mother)

Guang, Jie and Qiang's mothers are all concerned about their children's diet:

"They only ate pickled vegetables in the winter, no fresh vegetables at all. The market is far from here; (the one) which sells fresh food is in the town. They do not seem bothered to take the money and time to buy it."

(Guang's mother)

"My aunt used to reheat the left-overs again and again. Jie even got ill because of the food he had. Old people don't want to waste any food. It is a good thing. But children are vulnerable to rotten food."

(Jie's mother)

"The food in his teacher's home is all right. He eats what they (his teacher's family) eat. I am much relieved because this age is crucial for physical development."

(Qiang's mother)

Guang and Jun's mothers also used the state of their children's clothes as indicative of their general welfare:

"My son doesn't know how to wash his clothes, and my in-laws are too busy to do that. Therefore his clothes are always dirty, unlike other children whose parents stay at home. Their clothes are clean and neat."

(Guang's mother)

"His clothes were not clean enough. They took him to the public shower room once a month!"

(Jun's mother)

Qiang's mother was concerned about how he spent his money, seeing this as indicative of how he was not being properly looked after:

"He wasted his pocket money on rubbish food and toys when he was living with his grandparents. His grandparents never asked him 'Where did the money go?' Mrs. Zhang keeps the money for him now. He has to list the things he wants to buy. Mrs Zhang can refuse his request if it is not necessary. I quite agree with her."

(Qiang's mother)

Seventy percent of left-behind children in the research reported they had had more pocket money since their parents went to work away. Seventy percent of left-behind children chose either "increased a little" or "increased a lot" when they were asked the question "How does the amount of pocket money you get now compare with what you received before your parent(s) worked away?" Thirty percent reported that they had more money than the children living with both parents (50% of left-behind children got more than 1 Yuan and only 20% of children living with both parents had that amount). But the extra pocket money they had was mainly used on "rubbish food and toys". (Eighty percent of left-behind children chose "food" and "toys" when it came to the question "What do you spend your pocket money on?" whilst only 50% of children living with both parents chose those options). Left-behind children living with their grandparents seldom had their pocket money controlled by them. Children who lived in surrogate houses or who were living with teachers had less pocket money than children living with grandparents and even less money than children who lived with both parents. These children were not allowed to keep money; they reported that they had to ask their guardians for money if they needed it. Jingjing's mother was concerned about the amount of housework her daughter had to do:

“When they (Jingjing’s grandparents) were busy Jingjing had to give them a hand. They are not as healthy as before. She washes her own clothes (and) sometimes has to wash clothes for her grandparents. ...We know she is growing up. But we still want her to have more time to study and play.”

(Jingjing’s mother)

Fei’s mother was also concerned about housework:

“This winter I noticed that Fei could cook some simple dishes. I asked how she could do that. She told me that she learned when she helped her grandmother cooking meals. Sometimes she even handled food by herself when her grandmother was not at home or was unwell.”

Guang and Qiang’s mothers were concerned about unsupervised leisure time and Qiang’s mother was much happier when this is controlled and disciplined:

“He spent lots of time in front of the TV. It is not good for his health and education. But his grandparents seldom stop him. They said that sitting at home is better than running out and about, at least it is safe.”

(Guang’s mother)

Those living with teachers or in surrogate houses reported a more closely supervised use of their leisure time, much more so than those living with their grandparents.

“Mrs. Zhang arranges his leisure time. There is a TV in the sitting room. He can watch the TV half an hour every night if he finishes his homework. Then he has to do some reading before going to bed.”

(Qiang’s mother)

Ninety percent of left-behind children living with grandparents reported that they spent their leisure time mainly watching TV, compared to less than 50% of children living with both parents. This was shown in their scrapbooks as well. Left-behind children in the research were more likely to stick cartoon stickers and pop stars in their scrap-books. Left-behind children seemed very familiar with TV characters, whilst there were more cuttings from books and drawings drawn by their parents in the not-left-behind children's scrapbooks. But left-behind children living in a surrogate house or living with teachers had a very strict timetable for watching TV and the programmes they watched were more child-friendly.

Discipline

Discipline was another feature emphasised by parents as an essential part of playing the role of guardian properly. They attributed their children's bad habits to the guardians' neglect of their duty. Hence, discipline was considered as an important criterion for judging the effect of guardianship. Like Qiang's mother, Jun's mother sees the guardian as responsible for policing the use of leisure time:

"They (his paternal grandparents) spoiled him. (They) let him watch TV for a whole night. They seldom checked his school work, nor had contact with his teachers."

(Jun's mother)

Guang's mother also thinks his grandparents "spoil him" and that this has resulted in him being undisciplined in his emotions and bad -tempered. She thinks, this will make it more difficult for her in the future:

“Guang started to easily lose his temper. Any dissatisfaction would lead to an outburst of emotions. His grandparents spoiled him too much. It is will be hard for us to discipline him in the future.”(Guang’s mother)

How Parents Monitor their Children’s Well-Being from a Distance

Leaving their child behind was a constant source of worry and uncertainty, but parents hoped their children could live a better life, with more financial support and that their well-being could be improved in a comprehensive way. Not only did they review and re-arrange the guardianships where necessary, but they also tried their best to monitor their children’s welfare. They tried to do this in a variety of different ways.

Phone calls were the most frequently used methods to collect information about the children’s life, since it is widely available and convenient. About 80% of the left-behind children participating in this research had a phone call from their parents every week. However, some of the other 20% left-behind children just only talked to their parents once a month. All parents in the research used the telephone to gather knowledge about their children. So, for instance, Guang’s mother did a weekly check on her son:

“I rang his grandparents every week and asked them how things were going. I told them to buy anything they and Guang needed and (to buy) more meat and fruit.”

(Guang’s mother)

Jingjing's mother was anxious at first and called home all the time:

"We called home quite often when we had first migrated. I wanted to make certain that Jingjing was fine. After three month we called less often. We knew she was OK with her grandparents. They could call me if anything went wrong. Jingjing is a well-behaved girl. We are not too worried."

Other parents also relied on the guardian to be in contact with them by phone should anything be of worry to them and tried to supervise any crisis from a distance:

"Sometimes Mrs Zhang called me. But I rang her more. We mainly focused on Qiang's studies and health. He had a high temperature. She sent him to the hospital. They asked a relative to pay the deposit. She gave me a call and told me the situation. We couldn't return at that time, so I asked my brother to take charge of it. I made many phone calls to get any updated news."

(Qiang's mother)

Parents who were very concerned about their children's school performance, also often made contact with school teachers by telephoning them to check on the progress of their children, and ask for special favours in supervising improvement in the future. Jun's mother, for instance reported that:

"I called his school teacher after I got his transcript. I asked the reason why his marks were so low. His head-teacher told me about his school performance apart from the marks. (He was not concentrating on his teachers when they were teaching and read cartoon books (and)

sometimes fell asleep) I was quite upset and asked the teacher to pay more attention to Jun and call me if he didn't behave himself."

Fei's mother also used the phone to monitor her daughter's school performance:

"I called her head teacher several time after we went to Beijing. She was doing okay at school but not as active as before. Then I rang the teacher again after several months. I heard that her school performance (had) dropped. I was very worried about that and have called her every month since then."

Guang's mother also tried to get information about her son's school performance by calling his school teacher. The teacher gave her this and she also got some suggestions on how to improve her child's education from the teacher.

"I called his school teacher to know whether he was behaving himself, such as whether he did was doing his homework well, whether he was concentrating in the classes and whether he was attending classes on time. His school teacher was very nice. She told me everything I wanted to know, and she suggested to me to buy some tutorial books for him."

(Guang's mother)

Most parents tried to monitor their children's well-being via the telephone. This included discipline, encouraging them and comforting them and listening carefully for anything which suggested that things were not quite right. Jie's mother was disappointed that discipline on the telephone wasn't very effective:

"I gave him a good telling off when I learnt he did hadn't been doing his homework carefully and wasting money on rubbish food. I talked that issue over with him several times. But it didn't work very well. He still carried on doing it."

Hong's mother was concerned more about her emotional changes, and gave her more encouragement than discipline:

"She was very upset because she did not get good marks in the mid-term exam. I encouraged her and told her to relax. It was just one test. She had done her best. She would be more successful next time."
(Hong's mother)

Love and care were also given on the telephone on some special occasions. Qiang's mother reported:

"I talked to him when he was in the hospital with a high temperature fever. He was quite weak and missed us very much. I felt very sad as well. But I had to be strong. I promised him to return home early and buy him some toys that he liked."

Lingling's mother thought talking on the telephone was a good way to maintain a good daughter-mother relationship:

"Sometimes nothing happened. She just told me about something happy or sad for her. I just listened to her chattering. I think it is good for our relationship."

Visiting was the most effective way to improve the children's well-being, even if the parents were not able to stay with them for a long time. In the questionnaire sample, over 90% of left-behind children reported that they were only able to

see their parents once a year. Parents usually returned home during Chinese New Year. Some of them might choose other occasions but they had to fit this in with work demands and the availability of transport. When they went back home, their children would spend a period of time with them. During this time, parents might discipline their children or try to give them treats. Most parents tended to make gestures to make up for not seeing the children, but a few tried to discipline them.

Guang's mother and father made the most of their time at home to help him with his homework. But the short time available was often not sufficient.

"His father and I checked his homework every day. If he didn't finish he was not allowed to watch TV or play. We hoped that we could improve his school performance during that time. But it didn't work at all. His examination marks were still very low."

(Guang's mother)

Parents used their own different methods to show their concern for their children. All the parents in this study brought gifts for their children when they returned home. Clothes, books and toys were the most commonly mentioned in the narratives.

Hong's mother knew her hobbies and gave her gifts that they knew she would like:

"We bought her some fancy books and story books when we returned home. She liked reading books. We bought her new clothes if we returned home before Chinese New Year. She never asked for any of that, but we thought we should make our girl more look pretty."

Jun's mother hoped her son could become more knowledgeable but the gifts were not to his taste:

"He told us what he wanted. He wanted toys most of the time. His father did not let me buy more toys for him. But I thought that if the toys could make him happy they were worth it. We used to buy him lots of books but he did not feel like reading any of them. So we stopped."

(Jun's mother)

Lingling's mother spent a very significant amount of money on her daughter to make up for their absence, by buying an electronic piano as a symbol of the modern way of life and growing up.

"Toys, books, clothes, food, lots of things, last year we even bought her an electronic piano that nobody else had in the village. She was very happy. She was learning music at that time, but nobody taught them how to play piano until later on. It was a shame."

(Lingling's mother)

Parents were also more likely to spend "quality time" with their children when they were together. The majority of them tried to make their children happy as far as possible. Qiang's parents chose to give him an outing in the town:

"We took Qiang to the park in town. We had a good day there. I could see that he enjoyed it. Then we went to some shops. He chose a bag that he liked."

(Qiang's mother)

Jingjing's parents wanted their daughter and themselves to try and get to know each other better:

"She stayed with us when we visited, not at her grandparents. We spent most of the time together. I told her some stories about the city. Her father helped her with her homework. I could tell she had changed since we left home. But we were still very close."

(Jingjing's mother)

Some parents visited their children's school teacher when they were at home. Lingling's mother reported a visit to Lingling's school teacher, and their discussion about her:

"I went to her teacher's home and gave her some gifts before Chinese New Year. We talked about her (daughter's) study and behaviour. Her teacher was very nice. She gave me some suggestions such as asking her grandparents to give her less housework to do and buying things to take care of her cleanliness. Her clothes were sometimes quite dirty."

Jun's school teacher recalled the time when his mother came to her and the main points of their discussion:

"His mother came to me and asked why Jun's school performance had dropped. I took out his examination paper and discussed it with her. And I also told her about Jun's conduct at school, such as homework and involvement in activities. I could see that she (Jun's mother) was not satisfied with her son's school performance. She kept asking me to pay more attention to him and beat him if he did not behave himself and work hard."

The Impact of Arrangements on the Children's Well-being

Type of Guardianship

Six of the nine left-behind children covered in this chapter, lived or used to live with their grandparents. All of the grandparents are their father's parents. All of the six left-behind children living with grandparents experienced a drop in school performance in the last year and were reported having more housework to do, but more pocket money compared with other left-behind children. Most of their teachers or parents also saw changes in their emotional behaviour. For example, Fei's teacher recognised that she was quieter and less active than before. Jingjing was said by her teacher to be more sensitive and less happy since her parents went to work away. Furthermore, the drop in her school performance had made her more worried and lacking in self-confidence. One left-behind child lived with his mother's aunt, but his mother was thinking of re-arranging his guardianship. This child seldom got any discipline from the mother's aunt which made him "go wild" to use both his teacher's and mother's term. Lack of support and supervision of his studies also gave rise to a drop in his school performance. His teacher reported that he had been in more trouble than before and was very hard to discipline.

Qiang lived with his paternal grandparents for one year, but then went to live with his school teacher (Mrs. Zhang). His school performance dropped sharply during the time he was living with his grandparents; according to his mother, his grandparents let him watch TV for hours and did not control his use of money. He became "spoilt" and because of that, hard to discipline. As a result of this, his mother sent him to live with his school teacher. Since then, he got better marks in his school tests and spent much less money on "rubbish food and toys". He was also reported to be behaving better than when he was living with his grandparents.

Hong used to live with her parents in their host city but returned home three years ago. She was now living in a surrogate family. However, she had very strong feelings for her parents and missed them very much after she moved back home. In her school tests she had been behind her classmates when she returned home, because of the difference in lessons she had received in the primary school for migrant children in the city. Therefore, she was held back for a year. Her school performance gradually improved after she settled down in the surrogate house. Both her guardian and her class teacher gave her very good comments on her progress, which was very rare amongst the left-behind children.

All of the nine children who had been left behind for more than three years, reported that their relationship with their parents had changed over time. Most parents suggested that they were not as close as before. They reported only having a few words to say to their parents. None of them talked about their aspirations with them. The questionnaire survey results show that less than 10% of the 35 left-behind children in the sample told their parents about their aspirations. This compared very unfavourably with the 80% of children living with both parents, who discussed their aspirations with their parents. While parents tried their best to improve their children's well-being, often their care, supervision and support could not be replaced by other people. The long absence of parents had a potentially long-lasting impact upon the children's daily life, education and emotional development. Three types of children answered the questionnaire and were interviewed at the first stage of the research (left-behind children, children with one parent who had migrated and children with both parents living at home in the countryside). There is some clear evidence from the survey of migration having a negative effect on the well-being of children. Various indicators of well-being were used to evaluate this. The questionnaire results show that after being left-behind for more than half a year, the standard of living of 90% of left-behind children declined,

compared to only 20% of children who had only one parent's absent. Ninety percent of left-behind children either had worse food, less frequent showers or more housework and only 20% of children living with one parent claimed the same. Eighty percent of left-behind children said they did not get enough educational support compared to 10% of children who lived with one parent and 4% of children living with both parents. However, the impact is not always the same. Left-behind children changed over time, from the first stage of the research, when they answered the questionnaire, to the final stage when they were interviewed. The nine main case studies reported on in this chapter suggest that left-behind children were very much affected by the absence from their parents. The following paragraphs show the children's experiences and their feelings about their new guardians.

Daily life

Most left-behind children in the research indicated that their standard of living declined to some extent after their parents' migration. The questionnaire results showed that 90% of left-behind children thought the food they had received from their guardians was generally much worse than when their parents were at home. Ninety-five percent of left-behind children only had meat once a week. This compares unfavourably with the 50% of children living at home with both parents who said they had meat three times a week. Ninety percent of left-behind children complained about their meals compared to just 10% children living with both parents. Eighty-five percent of those who were living with teachers or in surrogate houses also mentioned the difference between the food they had with their parents and the food they had in their new residence.

Fei did not like her grandmother's cooking style and described it as (literally) very hard to swallow:

“My grandmother stewed vegetables all the time. She just reheated them for the next meal. I hated it. Sometimes I refused to eat it. It tasted bad. But I didn’t have other things to eat. I had to eat some if I was very hungry. I missed my mother at that moment. She cooked different food.”

Lack of meat and fresh vegetables was also the reason that left-behind children expressed their discontent.

“They seldom bought meat. We ate meat only twice a month. My classmates whose parents were at home had meat twice a week. I envied them. My mother used to cook meat at least once a week. I hope they can stay at home longer this year so we can have more meat to eat.”

(Guang)

Unhealthy food even led to illness, and left-behind children were more likely to be vulnerable to this:

“I was sick and had an upset stomach. I guessed it was the rice which went bad. My grandmother (his mother’s aunt) kept it for a couple of days and didn’t put it in the fridge in summer. I told my mother about that. My mother gave her more money and asked her to cook fresh food for me. But I still had some leftovers.”

(Jie)

When it was the busy season on the farm, some left-behind children had to live on instant noodles or had nothing for one meal.

"When my grandparents were very busy on the land they did not have time to go home and cook for me. I just had some instant noodles or rice without anything to accompany it."

(Fei)

Heavy housework and other work on the land was one of the reasons which contributed to the food issue. Furthermore, parents noted other factors. Guang's mother considered that:

"They (Guang's grandparents) went through hard times. So they were fine with the food they gave to Guang. Even though I sent them more money, they still wanted to save it. The notion (of thriftiness) is hard to change, you know."

(Guang's mother)

As well as the old concept (of thriftiness), insufficient knowledge about cleanliness and nutrition also seemed important.

"My aunt didn't know what they should be eating for meals. She did not understand the balance of nutrition. She was in her 70s and had had only a few days' schooling. It was hard to persuade her."

(Jie's mother)

Left-behind children living with older guardians of the grandparents' generation in rural areas experienced a change of food quality and style. Children who were living in a surrogate house or living with teachers or other people also felt the differences.

"The food is 'so so' and not as tasty as my mother cooked, and we only have a little meat to eat. They (the owners) don't supply any fruit. Some

parents (of other children in the house who were not left-behind children but who live near here) brought fruit or other food for their children. My uncle brings some to me about once a month."

(Hong)

Hong's mother explained why the children didn't eat well in the surrogate family:

"They (the owners) did not use expensive ingredients for cooking. Potato, cabbage, carrots were more often served than other vegetables. Meat is quite expensive. They seldom buy it. They never cooked fish for the children. The chef cooks for over 20 children. How do you look forward to tasty dishes?"

Left-behind children living with teachers held a more positive attitude toward the food than other left-behind children:

"The food is OK. I have meals with her family. But they don't supply any fruit. I guess they eat fruit behind my back."

(Qiang)

People taking care of children as a means of earning money tended to concentrate on the reduction of cost. Thus, the main expense of food was kept as low as possible. Few parents complained about this, as their children didn't need to do any housework and they also had someone to supervise their study. Left-behind children living in rural areas, especially girls, took more responsibility for the guardians' housework. Jingjing who lived with her grandparents in the village reported:

"I have to wash my own clothes and dishes after meals. Sometimes I have to feed the chicken and pigs when my grandparents are working

on the land and can't come back home on time. I was late for the first class one afternoon as I could not get rid of the chicken droppings on my shoes. It was smelly. ... My parents didn't let me do such work when they were at home. I just needed to study hard. But now I spend time on housework. I have less time to study and play with friends. We have kind of drifted apart."

Jingjing's experiences were not unique among the left-behind children participating in the research. The questionnaire showed that more than 80% of the left-behind children living with their grandparents had increased housework and other work on the land to do, including washing clothes, washing dishes, cooking meals, attending to those who were ill, looking after domestic animals, ploughing and weeding. Fifty five percent of the left-behind children living in a rural area said that they normally did housework after school, whereas only 8% of children living with both parents did so, and only occasionally. Some left-behind children helped their guardians with the farm work when their guardians needed a hand:

"I spent the whole summer holiday on the farm last summer. It was very dry. We used the well to irrigate the herbs and other plants. I had to keep an eye on the water and move the pump. It was very hot. I suffered from heat stroke one day, and had to take some medicine. I went back to the land soon after I felt better."

(Fei)

Boys usually had less housework to do compared to the girls. But they still had to shoulder more household duties than the children with both parents at home.

"My friends living with their parents did not need to do any housework. My grandmother asked me to collect the dishes after meals. Sometime

I washed the bowls and plates. I did not need to do that when I lived with my parents.”

(Guang)

Apart from food and housework, cleanliness was another issue which arose due to the parents' migration. Only 20% of left-behind children answering the questionnaire suggested they changed clothes and took showers every week, compared to 90% of children who lived with both parents. While many left-behind children did not recognise this was a problem, their migrant parents noticed it and were worried about it.

“My son doesn't know how to wash his clothes, and my in-laws are too busy to do it. Therefore, his clothes are always dirty unlike other children whose parents stay at home. Their clothes are clean and neat.”

(Guang's mother)

Jun's mother also showed similar concerns. There was generally no household shower-room in the rural area I researched. But the older guardians didn't take the left-behind children to the public bath very often either. They seemed to lack awareness of cleanliness issues or treat them seriously.

“His clothes are not clean enough. They (Jun's grandparents) take him to the public bath once a month!... Jun's neck was very black. His grandmother did not care about washing his face at all, not to say his neck.”

(Jun's mother)

The children cared for in surrogate families had a more regular schedule of changing clothes and taking showers. However, these children only accounted

for a small proportion of all the left-behind children in the research. From the narratives it can be concluded that parents' migration affected the children's quality of life. Despite the enhancement of their parent's financial capacity due to migration, this did not seem to improve their life very dramatically. Indeed, for most left-behind children, as shown above, their living standard tended to decline.

Education

Most left-behind children in the research didn't admit that their school performance had dropped since their parent's migration. However, other people did notice, including their guardians, their school teachers, and especially their parents, and they certainly showed their concern about this.

"Jingjing's marks were not as high as before last term. I tried to explore the reasons. I noticed myself and also got from the other teachers that she was dozing off while attending classes, and that she seemed to be quite tired in the afternoon."

(Jingjing's school teacher)

Her mother was deeply worried about this.

"My girl used to have a very good school performance. She always focused on the lessons and paid a lot of attention to her studies, but from her school teacher's feedback last term, she didn't do very well."

(Jingjing's mother)

Jingjing's dropping school performance seemed to be the result of the heavy housework she was having to do since her parent's migration.

Guang's teacher had similar comments about his schooling but did not indicate the reasons.

"Guang got average marks in the examinations before his parents went to the city. But his marks are very low now. He got a score of only 40 in the last class test, the worst in the class."

(Guang's teacher)

Hong's experiences were different from other left-behind children. She had returned from her parents' host city and lived in a surrogate house when she came back to her home town. She had spent a year in a migrant school in the city. Her mother described her education after she became a left-behind child:

"It is better for her to live in the surrogate family than live with us in the city. Her school teachers are very nice and the owners of the surrogate house take full responsibility for her study in the afternoon. Her school performance is better than in the school for migrant children. However, she could not quite catch up with her classmates when she returned back home to the rural area. But now she is quite okay there."

(Hong's mother)

Although the children were reluctant to talk about their school performance, their description of their school life and study time indicated that their parent's migration did, indeed, influence their education, albeit from a different perspective from their parents'. They reported a lack of support and supervision in their studies after school. In answer to the question: "What do you do when you have problems with your homework?", 80% of left-behind children living with grandparents turned to a teacher and 20% of them had nobody to turn to.

However, children living with both parents tended to get help from their parents, who were better educated than the older generation.

"My grandparents could not help me with my homework. I used to ask my father when I came across any problem. My grandparents couldn't do that at all. I now have to leave these to the teacher."

(Fei)

Due to the guardian's level of education, most left-behind children living with their grandparents were not able to get supervision or support.

"Jun's grandparents weren't able to check his homework nor supervise his study. I am very worried about that. If his maths, which he failed last term, does not improve, he will be refused (entry) by (the) better middle school."

(Jun's mother)

Children living in surrogate families or living with school teachers reported receiving more support than those living with grandparents or other relatives. Furthermore, their school performance was enhanced after staying there for a while.

"When I first went to stay with Mrs Zhang, she gave me extra tuition for my maths until I was able to catch up with my classmates. Now she still checks my homework every day. I can ask her for help if I have any problem with my studies."

(Qiang)

Lack of supervision and support was only one disadvantage confronted by some left-behind children. The amount of housework they did also had an influence on their education.

"I felt very tired after I had washed my clothes and shoes, but I had to go to school. But I fell asleep in the class. This was the first time I fell asleep in the class."

(Jingjing)

Household duties increased after their parents left. Left-behind children had to shoulder part of the work that they could manage, including washing up, cooking, taking care of younger siblings and even looking after their guardians. This all gave rise to negative effects on the left-behind children's education, as has been commented upon by other researchers (Ye, 2008). Furthermore, feelings of missing their migrant parents also distracted their attention away from their studies.

"I missed my mother very much. Sometime I wasn't able to focus on the teacher and my homework. I'm looking forward to her coming back. If I knew she was coming home next month I couldn't do anything from now on."

(Fei)

Most left-behind children in the research wished they could go to university and go to the city. The information and gifts they got from their parents strengthened their longing to be part of this distant "outside world". Education was likely to provide the best route to allow them to move from their rural home town to urban cities.

“I hope I can go to university in Beijing where my parents are working now. They brought me a lot of pictures and told me a lot of stories about their life there. I want to get a good job after graduation and buy a house for us.”

(Guang)

Importantly, very few left-behind children regarded “schooling as worthless” (Lv, 2007). The children thought that their parents did not have a particularly high standard of education, but they were still able to go to the city and made plenty of money. The children thought they could follow in their parents’ footsteps. However, despite this, none of the children in my research thought that education was worthless, rather, the opposite was found. Good performance at school was thought of as an important aid to geographical mobility. Parents also believed that going to the university was the best way to get out of a rural area and attain more social resources, and better than other ways, such as becoming a migrant labourer.

“I hope my son can go to the university in the city and get a good job, not just like us who do the dirtiest and most tiring job there.”

(Jun’s mother)

Emotional Development

Emotional development is a significant factor in the children’s socialisation process. Childhood is the crucial stage for the formation of children’s psychological world and becoming socialised. Children invariably received some physical and psychological support from their guardians. Through attachment to adults and emotional communication with adults, children can often achieve a sense of security and trust in society (Shaffer, 2002, p.396). Children at this stage of development (aged 7-12) were especially eager to be

living with their parents. If a strong bond is not established at this stage some children will become quieter, lacking in confidence and lack feelings of safety and security (Wang, 2008). In this research, most children had been left behind for almost three years. During this period, the time they had spent with their parents was negligible. Real emotional communication and parent-child interaction was rare. It is arguable that the lack of an effectively functioning family structure had a fundamental impact on the children's characteristics and emotions (Ye, 2008).

When asked a question about attitudes and beliefs about themselves, with answers from a self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965), 75% of left-behind children compared to 43% not-left-behind children chose statements indicating low self-esteem:

"Which of the following statements are really true about you?", elicited negative statements such as:

"At times I think I am no good at all",

"I feel I do not have much to be proud of",

"I certainly feel useless at times",

"I wish I could have more respect for myself",

"All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure".

rather than the following positive ones:

"On the whole I am satisfied with myself";

"I think that I have a number of good qualities";

"I am able to do things as well as most other people";

"I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others";

"I take a positive attitude towards myself".

This evidence of low self esteem is also hinted at in some of the case studies; Jun described his feeling after several parent-teacher meetings:

“I felt very upset and lonely when other children’s parents attended the parent-teacher meetings. My grandfather attended twice out of three times in the last 3 years. Nobody attended on the other occasion. He missed (it) because my grandparents were selling pork at the market. Other people were busy with their own things. I felt so sad and didn’t want to do anything or talk to anybody for quite a few days.”

His school teacher mentioned his change after that parent-teacher meeting:

“He became very quiet and introverted and seemed to be absent-minded in the class. He seldom took part in any activities or competitions since then. I considered that this might be something to do with his parents’ migration.”

His mother also found that they were not as close as before.

“He used to talk a lot to me, (about) his teacher, his friends, his hobbies. But now he had few words for me. I didn’t know what he was thinking about. He didn’t tell his grandparents either.”

By triangulating data sources, narratives from the left-behind child, from the teacher and from his mother, the “parent-teacher meeting” event was explored from the beginning to the end. The whole process and its effect on different people also unfolded.

Most children participating in this research tended to turn to their parents when they got into trouble, but of course, only when their parents were available. The

children with both parents working away were more likely to report that they were left to solve their problems by themselves and had less communication with the adults living with him. However, children often needed their parents company, especially when they found themselves in unexpected situations. Their parents' absence could cause a great impact on a child's psychological world.

Qiang used to live with his grandparents and moved to his teacher's house. He developed a high fever because of typhoid. The teacher sent him to hospital. He was then hospitalised for a few days, quite dramatic events in the life of a child. He told of his feelings at the time:

"This was the first time I was confined to hospital. I could not speak and I found that it was hard to swallow food. I felt terrible! I hoped my parents could be with me. I felt so lonely and helpless. We talked on the telephone. They spoke and I listened. They promised me lots of gifts. But I just wanted them to stay with me."

This is a poignant description of how simple, material, compensations are sometimes not enough. What Qiang wanted was the physical, spatial and emotional contact with his parents, not promises of gifts.

Impacts on Other Groups

The migration of rural labourers not only had a great impact on their children, but also influenced other people who were involved. The left-behind children's guardians and school teachers were affected more than others. The traditional

notion of “good parenting” was also significantly changed due to factors associated with mass social mobility.

Impact on Guardians

Few of the left-behind children’s guardians complained about the parents’ migration, but from their description of their life the considerable extra burdens they had taken on could be discerned as well as the way in which this had a great impact upon them. Jingjing had been living with her grandparents for 3 years. Her parents only returned home during Chinese New Year and spent just one week with her during the year. Both of Jingjing’s grandparents were in their 70s. They only had one child (Jingjing’s father), and whilst they were happy to look after Jingjing from the beginning, they gradually felt unable to do so as well as they had hoped. They continued to have their own farm work and housework to do in addition to taking care of Jingjing. All these responsibilities made them very stressed:

“They (Jingjing’s parents) could give us a hand with the land when they were at home. But now they have gone to the city and left Jingjing with us. We have to cook for her, wash for her. It is hard work. We could do all this easily if it was five years ago. But now we are nearly 70 years old. We wanted somebody to look after us. It was said ‘Bring up children with the aim to guard against troubles in one’s late years; bring up sons to provide for one’s old age’. You cannot count on them at all. They would ask you to do more for them.”

Jun’s grandmother expressed similar feelings about the burdens.

“It is not easy to take care of Jun, cooking, washing, sometimes you have to think about his safety. If he does not come home on time after

school his grandfather has to look everywhere for him. It is our responsibility to make sure he is in safe hands. We are more nervous in winter when the river is not frozen solid. We are afraid that he would go skating on the ice and fall into the water. His grandfather has to pick up him from the school every day.”

For Guang's grandmother the extra work was less important than the clash between the two generations in terms of how they perceive the role of being a “good parent/guardian”.

“My daughter-in-law queried our guardianship (how we looked after children). She thought I let Guang watch too much TV. What was I to do if we were busy with work? I am not able to keep an eye on him all the time. And watching TV is better than hanging out with some bad boys. ... Guang's school performance dropped this term. His mother had words with me (about this) and was very unhappy. I was unhappy too, with her attitude!”

The conflict between Lele's mother and her grandparents was similar to Guang's family's. While their conflict was more complicated, Lele's grandmother considered that when Lele's mother's made different arrangements for Lele, this indicated dissatisfaction with all the efforts she had put in to looking after him in the past.

“She always said we spoiled Lele and weren't able to give her effective support for his schooling. What did they do? They brought lots of useless gifts (toys, clothes) for him. I don't think Lele's dropped school performance was our fault. They did not look after their child themselves, depending on us to educate him. We didn't have the ability. Now they have sent Lele to her teacher's house and pay her hundreds

of Yuan every month. They are wasting money. They didn't give us any money when we took care of Lele, they even found fault with our work. We were very upset when they sent Lele to her teacher's family. I miss my granddaughter everyday."

(Lele's grandmother)

Impact on School Teachers

Most of their school teachers noticed marked changes in the left-behind children. The parents' migration created significant inconvenience to them, through the children's lack of discipline and declining educational performance. It could be that the behaviour of left-behind children is used as a scapegoat for the declining behaviour of all children. But whatever the truth of this, the head-teacher could point to instances he thought illustrated how they are the root cause of many of the problems he faced.

Jie's head-teacher suggested that left-behind children's school performance was much worse than that of non-left-behind children. She thought they tended to be more lonely and self-centred. Furthermore, it was also hard to make contact with their parents to discuss what might be done to rectify this. She also thought that their guardians let them do as they liked, and complained that sometime the behaviour of left-behind children had a negative influence on teachers and other students:

"Jie brought a toy gun to the class the other day. Although it was not a real one, he was still not allowed to play (with such a toy) in the school. I asked him not to bring it anymore. He promised. But he brought it in again. I called his grandmother (and asked her) to discipline him. But it did not work. What was worse, other students brought their toy guns (in

to school) as well. One student was injured by the plastic bullets. This was not Jie's toy gun but other's. I lost the reward (my bonus) of the term because of the accident."

Hong's school teacher had different story about her.

"Hong worked very hard to catch up with other classmates. I called on other people to learn from her. She is the best left-behind child in my class. I always mention her name to inspire other left-behind children."

Mrs. Zhang is both Qiang's head-teacher and fulfils the role of his guardian. There are four left-behind children in her house (including Qiang). In her opinion left-behind children are much more difficult to look after. She said she soon became exhausted by the task. Acting as guardian to left-behind children provided her with the opportunity to earn extra money, although strictly this was not allowed by the school regulations. Despite this, there were still several teachers engaged in the same business.

"It is not easy to take care of 4 children if you have a full-time job. You have to look after them, and supervise their study. I feel really tired after they go to bed. But our income is very low. We want to make some money from this. Their parents trusted me and left their children with me. I would host more left-behind children if I had more rooms. ... There is competition. Lots of teachers in my school want to host some students. It is better than private tutoring, although neither of those are allowed by the rules of our school. We could say that the children staying with us are our relatives."

Mrs. Zhang did not take on the four left-behind children at the same time. They came to her house one by one. Qiang was the second child to start living with

her. Most left-behind children in his class knew that their class teachers could provide accommodation and care for them. Their parents could choose between different teachers. Some parents chose to leave their children with their teachers. Others left their children with family members but asked their children to go to the teacher's house and do their studying with the children who were living there. They could get the teacher to do the supervision and extra tutoring as well. A small amount of money would be paid for this service. Mrs. Wang reported more details:

"I host just two left-behind children now. I used to host five left-behind children and one single-parent child. Two left-behind children returned home and one left-behind child went to middle school and lived in the school accommodation. I feel much easier to just take care of three children with my mother's help. So I invited some children who did not live with me to come over and provided the studying atmosphere and supervision. It is not easy to get the students now. More and more surrogate families and private hosts are fighting for this opportunity."

Conclusions

This chapter outlined and analysed the experiences of further a nine left-behind children. The four case studies have not been included in the analysis presented in this chapter although having the same themes apply to them too. It included four main sources of evidence, on five aspects of the issue as seen from the perspective of: left-behind children; the children's parents; the children's guardians; and the children's teachers. It also attempted to triangulate the data from the different sources in order to produce a more rounded interpretation of events (Denzin, 1970). Within this approach it mainly focused on parents' negotiations with and monitoring of guardians, in order to

examine the difficulties and dilemmas they faced in making decisions about the care of their child(ren). This thesis argues that the parents of left-behind children do not leave them without a careful consideration of the options they have available to them. Furthermore, the decision to leave their child behind is rarely an isolated event; rather, it is a process of an accumulation of experience, knowledge and awareness of different opportunity structures, and an understanding and weighting of different elements of care. There is also some negotiation between alternative care providers. In making difficult decisions, parents take into account the limitations and opportunities available to them by virtue of the jobs they have in the city, their past and present household economic status, and the education systems available to the children. Some parents followed the more traditional route of leaving their children with their grandparents. However, many parents seriously evaluated (and eventually doubted) the ability of grandparents as potential guardians before reaching a decision. These decisions are also kept under constant review, which parents accomplish through phone calls and visits. They also use different ways to monitor the well-being of their children. Also, whilst many try to provide compensation to their children for their absence, they also keep the type of guardianships they have arranged under review. The negative impact of parents' migration upon left-behind children cannot be completely eliminated whatever the efforts of the parents. As also illustrated in the previous case studies (Chapter 3) and this chapter, the influence on left-behind children is cumulative, and the adverse impact of being left behind upon children's educational attainment, behaviour and well-being is the result of complex factors. The drop in school performance could be the result of lack of supervision, additional housework duties, or the distracted attention of children caused by missing their parents. The impact of their parents' absence can affect children's educational achievement either directly or indirectly. The consequences are likely to be a combination of factors which intensify and interact with each other in the long term.

Chapter 5 Conclusions, Further Discussion of Issues and Implications of the Research

Introduction

This chapter will review the thesis as a whole, reminding the reader of the main issues which have been covered and arguments made. It begins by outlining the main elements which constitute its unique contribution to knowledge. This highlights the distinctive methodology and perspective used within the research as well as some of main empirical findings. A summary of these main findings is then given followed by a discussion of some of the main empirical issues which came out of the research. Recommendations for policy and practice are then made. Finally it is thought appropriate to comment on some of the limitations of this study and some unanswered questions which could form the basis of future research.

The thesis began by reviewing the emergence of left-behind children. This was mainly based on an examination of recent literature on changing family structures and the impact of parental economic migration on the well-being of the children. This review was then used to develop the series of research aims which became the focus of the field research. These are summarised on pages 54-55 and will not be repeated in detail here.

These aims also gave rise to the research design which guided the empirical research conducted for the thesis. This design involved using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (although predominantly the latter) to develop a comprehensive understanding of the left-behind children's lives.

However, of particular importance with the research methodology was the adoption of a longitudinal perspective on the *process* of being left behind.

Participant observation and semi-structured interviews were the main qualitative methods used to collect data from children, their parents, their guardians, their school teachers and other relevant people. Visual data about their life history was also gathered as part of this process. Triangulated data from the different participants was analysed using both cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches. The research confirms the overall argument of the thesis that being left behind is a dynamic process rather than a single incident affecting the children. It further suggests that the impacts of their parents' migration on the children are both complex and cumulative.

Contribution to Knowledge

Firstly, the research undertaken for this thesis has employed a very distinctive methodology. This has also embodied a perspective for examining the “process” of being left behind. The methodology was based upon the use of longitudinal qualitative methods (LQM) but also involved the blending of this with the use of visual methodologies and some (more limited) use of more formal quantitative methods. This methodological approach to the examination of this issue has allowed the development of a new and different analytical framework, which has brought fresh and different insights to the processes of being left behind. This involved moving away from the more traditional, static, correlational analysis based on data derived from large scale survey methodology which is more typically found in previous studies.

Secondly, this thesis has involved the development of a distinctive perspective;

one which views “being left behind” as a dynamic process rather than as a “single calamity”/ or a discrete event.

(1) Being left behind is a complex process rather than a simple event. It happens differently for different children in different circumstances.

(2) The status of being left behind changes over time. Left-behind children and not-left-behind children are not mutually exclusive. Their living arrangements are subject to change through time according to changing circumstances or decisions made by their parents in the hope of enhancing their well-being. Left-behind children’s guardians are not necessarily the same in the entire process. They also change.

(3) The impact of being left behind changes over time. But for some left-behind children, the impact of their parents’ absence is cumulative and difficult to resist or deflect.

(4) This dynamic process of being left behind is subject to changes and re-negotiation of parents, children and carers.

Thirdly, some of the substantive findings have raised important questions about the consequences for intergenerational conflict arising from economic migration. These substantive findings of the dissertation point to a tension and conflict between generations arising from migration patterns and the resulting care arrangements for left-behind children. Other substantive findings concern the growth of forms of surrogate care to fill a gap in welfare provision for children, the complexity of decision making by parents about arranging care for their children, and links between the economic and social structures associated with migration and its impact on parental choices. This further is discussed later in the main findings section of this chapter in more detail.

How the Research Aims are Addressed

Chapters 3 and 4 explored why parents left their children behind. Here it was reported that parents' decision to leave children in their home villages suggested that parent-child separation was only resorted to after parents' weighing together factors associated with the dangers and pitfalls of life in cities and its likely impact upon their children's well-being. By examining the reasons why thirteen children were left behind it was concluded that their parents' occupation, living conditions, income and entitlement to urban schooling were some of the main structural constraints for parents.

Apart from the constraints in cities, a number of new opportunities for parents were also beginning to emerge through the development of different forms of surrogate care and new opportunities for the supervision for left-behind children in rural areas and adjacent towns. Furthermore, government was beginning to recommend relevant people and organizations to provide such services, to give more concern to left-behind children, and to promote a diversity range of activities to improve their well-being of left behind children. Both the constraints in their host cities and the new opportunities in their home village came to take on a significant role in the decisions reached by parents about whether, and with whom, to leave their children behind.

Three main issues determined parents' decision on their children's guardianship: traditional ideals, guardians' ability and guardians' availability. The process of deciding on guardianship is combined with the parents' expectation, judgement, understanding of both traditional ideas and their own particular circumstances. However, parents did not always stick with their original judgements as to the most appropriate care arrangements for their child. Based on their feeling about the initial arrangement to their children, they

often turned to alternatives if their particular circumstance allowed this. Parents who made second arrangements also tended to have a more optimistic opinion about their children's future well-being. They were clearly concerned about every aspect of their child's development. Their child's school performance, daily life and the patterns of discipline exercised by their guardians were all of vital importance to parents.

We also examine how parents monitored their children's well-being and how they attempted to improve their children's well-being. Chapters 3 and 4, noted the use of phone calls and short term visits as some of the main strategies used by parents to gather news about their children. Meanwhile emotional support, discipline, as well as material compensation are also given by the parents in an attempt to enhance the children's welfare. The chapters also pointed to evidence that parents' migration had a significant impact on children's daily life, education, emotions and behaviour. This confirmed previous research studies (Fan et al, 2009; Lv, 2007; Sun & Sun, 2007; Wang, 2008; Wang et al, 2008; Ye, 2005 & Murray; Zhan & Zhang, 2005). However, by employing a longitudinal perspective (in, for instance the analysis of four cases in Chapter 3) this research was able to demonstrate how the impact of being left-behind changes over time and how, for some left-behind children, the impact of their parents' absence is cumulative and difficult to resist or deflect.

This research also explores the impact of children being left behind on their guardians, especially their grandparents, and their school teachers. It found that, apart from physical burden and psychological stress associated with looking after children, grandparents also experienced a conflict and tension between the generations in negotiating with parents the caring roles they had to bear. The phenomena of left-behind children not only create troubles to the school teachers but also provide them with opportunities of part-time work

looking after the children..

Methodology and the Development of a Distinctive Perspective

Chapter 1 of this thesis argues for the development of a different form of analysis and a radical new perspective in considering left-behind children. The perspective adopted in this thesis is based on viewing the process of being a left-behind child as a dynamic concept, with parents continually reviewing the care arrangements for their children, and sometimes changing these as a result of such a review. Much of the analysis conducted in previous research is based on a synchronic comparison of different patterns of care: grandparents' generation care; parents' generation care; and, self care. The type of analysis conducted under the new perspective being followed in this thesis stresses the importance of diachronic analysis, examining changing patterns of care through time. It is further argued in Chapter 4, that following the recommendations associated with longitudinal qualitative methods, diachronic analysis must be conducted prior to any comparison of different types of care arrangements. The distinctive methodological approach adopted in this thesis is explored and developed in Chapter 2, in which several features of longitudinal qualitative methods were outlined and discussed.

Summary of Longitudinal Research Methods

Longitudinal research methods, which seek to shed light on influences and changes over time, provided the research with a deeper understanding of the experiences, feelings and perspectives of children being left behind. It also

served to explore the processes of their parents assessing their decisions through time. The struggles, conflicts, negotiations and compromises which arose with the reality of children being left behind, and the resources available to cope with this situation unfolded gradually over the passage of time for both children and parents. The long term nature of this study enabled the adoption of a longitudinal approach. Taking advantage of this opportunity, interviews were conducted over a period of three years to a cohort of left-behind children who were selected to include a range of criteria to meet the needs of the study. This also allowed the continually developing findings to shape the direction of the inquiry.

Fieldwork was conducted at three stages spread over three years from 2008-2010. The first stage of data collecting aimed to establish a rapport with potential participants and gain their trust, obtain general information about the different types of children and make comparison between them. These respondents were interviewed using three different versions of a questionnaire concerning their general life, social relationships, education, access to resources and their feelings about their circumstances and prospects. According to the children's answers and the observation notes, a further 12 left-behind children and 4 not-left-behind children were recruited at the semi-structured interview stage of the research. Some of their guardians, teachers and other relevant people were also interviewed, to provide a more rounded picture of their changing circumstances as well as changes in their welfare and well-being.

At the second stage of fieldwork, 16 children including the 12 left-behind children and 4 not-left-behind children who had been selected at the first stage, took part in the semi-structured interviews. Eight left-behind children and 4 not-left-behind children were also provided with scrapbook packages, through which it was hoped to explore aspects of their stories through non-verbal

(visual) methodologies. This particularly focused on their life before their parents left home for the left-behind children, or before the winter holiday for the not-left-behind children. Some of the left-behind children's parents were also involved in the research for the first time at this stage, when they came back home for Chinese New Year. At this stage, changes in the children, compared with the previous stage, emerged from both their and others' narratives. A perspective focusing on the dynamics of being left-behind started to take shape and was enriched through an exploration of the parents making decisions, assessing their decisions and rearranging things if they deemed it to be necessary.

The final stage of this research built on the same participants, focusing on changes to the 12 left-behind children and one boy who was a left-behind child at the start of the research, but had reverted to living with his mother at the time of the third stage interviews. Other actors: the children's guardians, teachers and parents, if available, were interviewed about their perspective and responses to the changes which had taken place. The fluidity and dynamics of children being left behind unfolded through the strategies used at this third stage of fieldwork.

The research had clear time boundaries, with three different stages at which the data was collected. *Time* is a crucial factor in a longitudinal approach. It was viewed in a multiple and flexible way as the researcher attempted to interpret the dynamics of life experiences. The timing was also important to the design and anchored around Chinese New Year, which was both symbolic, as one year passed and a new one arrived, and a particularly personal time for family reunion followed by separation. The research also used the concept of "critical moments" which were unique and significant to individuals, and important in understanding the flow of their life events. Each child's experiences of being left behind were thus located in their complete life story

which was divided into two parts: before and after their parents' migration. Furthermore, their expectations and their self-image for the future shifted by reviewing their past experiences and current situation and served to identify changes in their surroundings and experiences. In this way, time could also be viewed as being reflected and projected into the future. A series of questions were used to analyse the changes emerging from different time frames.

Triangulation

This research benefited from the adoption of triangulation, which refers to the use of a combination of multiple data, investigators, theories and methodologies in the study of the same object. In this research, triangulation involved the use of multiple research methods: questionnaires, participant observation, semi-structured interviews and visual methodologies.

Data resource triangulation involved obtaining information from children, their guardians, their parents, their teachers and other relevant people, in three different localities. Participant observation and a structured-interview based study of the children allowed the researcher's direct perceptions of the left-behind-children, and also served to evaluate the validity of what she had seen and what she had obtained from their answers to questions. Visual imagery in the scrapbooks provided the participants with an opportunity to express themselves in their own way and reflect on their life story, where the researcher could access a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences, expectations and feelings. The data gathered from different social actors in the same events revealed distinctive responses and points of view over time, on the phenomenon of children being left-behind.

Main Findings from the Fieldwork

Chapters 3 and 4 illustrate some of the main themes of the thesis: that being “left-behind” is a complex multi-faceted process, rather than an event. The process includes parents making complex assessments of the child’s well-being and negotiations with carers and potential carers. The four case studies illustrated how parents hoped they had gained a rounded understanding of their children’s well-being, and were in a position to halt or reverse any adverse impacts of their absence on their children’s well-being. Different parents adopted different strategies. The differences between the different parents’ solutions partly resulted from differences in the financial support they were able to provide, as well as differences in the way in which they evaluated the importance of day-to-day care for their children.

The parents’ narratives about their decision to leave their children in their home villages suggests that parent-child separation was only resorted to after the parents had weighed up all the factors associated with the dangers and pitfalls of life in a city.

In this research, three main issues seemed to determine the parents’ decision about the guardianship of their children: traditional ideals, perceptions of the guardians’ ability and the guardians’ availability to take on the task. The process of deciding on guardianship was combined with the parents’ expectations, judgements and understanding of both traditional ideas and their own particular circumstances.

With the establishment of trust between the researcher and respondents and the passage of time, the parents began to clearly show their worries and doubts about the wisdom of their decisions. Parents who made

re-arrangements to guardians also tended to have a more optimistic opinion about their children's future well-being. They were clearly concerned about every aspect of their children's development; their children's school performance, daily life, and the patterns of discipline exercised by the appointed guardians were all important to parents.

Parents used a number of different ways to monitor and assess their children's well-being and these varied between the cases described. Most parents called the guardians and their children on the telephone to get updated news. However, this method was regarded as not particularly reliable, which it often proved to be. Furthermore, the information they got might not always reflect the truth. Both children and their guardians might hide bad news and pretend that everything was fine. Short visits were also important and sometimes regarded as the most effective way to enhance a child's welfare. It also offered them an opportunity to try to discipline their children, but more often to offer an opportunity to allow them to show their children some symbols of recompense for their absence in the form of presents and toys. At the same time these short visits home were also used to enhance their relationship with their children and were a time when their understanding of how their children had changed could be recognised at first hand. Because of this, the visits also became a time of reflection on the decisions they had made. Yet, because it was only a short period of time, the visit could rarely compensate for their long absence.

Many left-behind children's standard of living was reported to be lower than when their parents were at home, and children looked after by grandparents experienced a more significant drop than children looked by surrogate carers, in terms of food, housework and cleanliness. Both teachers and parents considered that the educational performance of most left-behind children had declined after their parents left. Some of them were reported to fall asleep or "doze off" in class, or to not finish their homework. On a more positive note, for

some children, their parents' migration opened a window to the outside world. Encouraged by this picture, they worked hard and were ambitious to go to university and seeing this as a means through which they could escape from their rural village.

Following a long absence of their parents, many left-behind children chose more negative statements to describe themselves than their not-left-behind counterparts. Left-behind children were also more likely to keep their emotional problems to themselves. A parent's absence on a special occasion, such as a parent-teacher meeting, traditional family re-union days, and during a child's illness, also seemed to intensify the damage done to their emotional development. The negative effects of their parents' migration can also be seen to be cumulative and to create a negative 'trajectory' through which momentum for change developed; changes which seemed impossible to resist.

Chapter 3 explores the process of being left behind based on four left-behind children's experiences. In Chapter 4 the questions which emerged from the analysis of the four case studies are examined cross-sectionally from the larger sample studied through semi-structured interviews. The research also raises some important issues that need to be addressed. Each of the main themes will be discussed in turn as well as the wider implications of the research findings for the future.

Being Looked After by One Parent

Children looked after by one parent who is living with them are also included in the group of left-behind children by some research. In this study, this type of arrangement was not defined as a "left-behind child" nor categorised as a specific form of guardianship. However, as being left behind is a dynamic

process, this type of care arrangement was included in the study, because some of the case studies experienced this type of care as part of their 'journey' through different types of care. The experience of being left behind by one parent was, therefore, examined as part of the whole process of being left behind. Both Cheng and Huan had the experience of being left behind by their father and living for a time with only their mother in their home town or village. Compared with the children who experienced both parents migrating, they seemed to experience better daily care and some forms of emotional consolation. Their school performance also benefitted from cooperation between teachers and their (still-at-home) parent. However, the migration of one parent still had some adverse impacts on these children's well-being.

The increased amount of work they had to do in the house and in the fields inevitably reduced the amount of attention the lone parent could pay to their child. The left-behind adults had to shoulder the extra responsibilities of the family and the community. Thus the time and energy available to take good care of the child and to supervise their studies was reduced. Sometimes they asked their children to share the workload, which also reduced their study and leisure time. Worrying about and missing their migrant husbands, as well as the pressure of their hard life, also impacted upon the emotional moods of the left-behind mothers. In such circumstances, children also became victims of their depression. One parent is not easily able to take the place of two, in terms of the different roles they play in the children's growth and the mother's emotional response to the absent father is also significant. Worrying about and missing their migrant parent can easily distract a child from their studies and create forms of emotional instability. Furthermore, a mother's return home after a long period of absence might fail to eliminate many of the negative impacts of the parents' migration. Both Cheng and Huan had the experience of being looked after by their left-behind mother on her own at some stage. Huan's mother stayed behind and then migrated to be with her husband. Cheng's

mother returned home after working away as a migrant worker for several years. For Cheng's mother, not only did she need to take on all the pressure from the family and the community; but in order to promote his well-being, she also needed to try her best to undo the adverse impact of Cheng being left behind by both of them.

School Performance and Parents' Decision-Making

The decision to leave a child with somebody or to change the care arrangement is only very rarely a simple one. The majority of parents regularly evaluate the pros and cons of their child's current situation, re-evaluating every aspect of the well-being of their children, and their options, as new opportunities become known to them. In this dynamic process, school performance is deemed as the paramount criterion used in assessing the success of a care placement.

The phone calls parents make to their children are mainly about the children's school performance. When they visit home, they always place great emphasis on their children's examination results. School performance was regarded as a clear and obvious factor which was easily manifested in exam results, and it was often the most immediate negative sign of the impact of the parents' absence. Children's educational achievement was also the main focus in the communication between parents and children's school teachers. Any change in the child's academic attainment always raised parents' concerns and was the most important factor used in assessing the guardians' work. Parental discontent at the child's school performance was also likely to lead to their dissatisfaction with the guardians, questioning the guardians' caring role and thoughts about changing the guardian. Particular incidents, such as a dramatic drop in examination marks or being held back a year in school, also speeded

up this process.

Parents attach great significance to their children's education, which is based on two well-known factors: firstly, traditional values, such as "*the worth of other pursuits is small, the study of books excels them all*" (万般皆下品,唯有读书高) are still widespread among parents in China; and, secondly, becoming registered as an urban resident under the Household Registered System, with all the benefits that brings, can only be achieved by receiving higher education and getting a decent job in a city. Thus, the only way for children to change their identity from a rural to an urban resident depends on the success of their education, which is particularly judged by examination marks. Parents who have migrated to the city have a better understanding of the importance of this channel than their seniors and others who have not had this experience.

Other Things Considered by Parents

Other factors considered by parents, when assessing the work of the appointed guardians, were: the children's daily diet, their cleanliness, access to pocket money, engagement in excessive housework and the children's use of their leisure time.

Understanding the importance of food and cleanliness to children's physical and mental development, some parents were concerned about these aspects of their children's well-being and asked their guardians to pay more attention to them; if the guardians failed to meet the parents' expectation in this regard, it was often commented on by the parents. This was especially true when they thought their child's health was in jeopardy because of the food they had been given.

Access to and use of pocket money was another issue of concern to parents and was a factor in the assessment of the adequacy of the care arrangements they had made for their child. Some parents were also concerned about the amount of housework their children shouldered, because this could have an adverse impact on the time they had to study. Some parents were also concerned if their child spent too much time alone in front of the TV, without strict supervision from their guardians. Supervision of leisure time was also a factor taken into account when making alternative arrangements for care away from grandparents.

Unlike the children's school performance, these factors alone seldom made parents rethink the children's living arrangements, but it was notable that one of the factors which were rarely mentioned as being important included the child's emotional well-being. This seemed to be prone to being overlooked by parents. Few parents deemed their children's psychological well-being as a significant criterion against which to evaluate the progress of their child's life since they migrated to the city, unless there was a specific incident which triggered their concerns.

Being Left Behind by Parents and Spoilt/Ignored by Grandparents

As reported in the literature, this research found that left-behind children living with their grandparents were more likely to be spoiled by their guardians. This issue mainly manifests in the unsupervised use of pocket money and the ways in which the child used their leisure time. The research indicates that left-behind children cared for by grandparents get more pocket money than children living with professional surrogate carers and not-left-behind children. Some parents give their children money before they go to the city, other

parents deposit money in local shops whilst others leave the money with the children's grandparents. Some children received money direct from their grandparents. A large proportion of the children in this study spent their pocket money on snack food or toys. Their grandparents seldom scrutinised how this money was spent. This contrasted with left-behind children living with professional surrogate carers, who were kept under strict control in both their access to money and how it was spent. Children in this type of care arrangement were not allowed to retain or ask for money without a good reason. The unsupervised use of pocket money by those looked after by grandparents was often combined with a lack of supervision of leisure time, especially watching TV. This was much less likely amongst children in surrogate families. Some left-behind children living with their grandparents spend hours and hours watching TV at the weekend and during school holidays. Those living with a surrogate carer, however, were much more regulated and most children stuck by the rules.

Grandparents were prone to "dote" on their grandchildren, especially when they were the only grandchild, under the family planning policy. They also hoped their love could make up for the parents' absence. Because of this, some of them tried their best to satisfy their grandchild's every whim and demand. Sometimes this was done under the guise of the child's safety, it was thought better for them to stay at home and stare at the TV screen if their grandparents were not around. Gradually the children got used to watching TV for as long as they wanted, with little control. Furthermore, a number of grandparents did not dare discipline the child's behaviour because they were afraid of the child running away from home. In this situation, they could only let them do what they wanted. For these reasons, children living with grandparents have more problems from being spoiled than other types of left-behind children.

Most left-behind children living with their grandparents seemed to lack self-discipline, because of their grandparents' lack of awareness of its importance, not knowing what to do, or reluctance to punish bad behaviour. Some children were reported to lose their tempers very easily and behaved badly and out of control. Some of the children's own accounts demonstrated this. Their physical and psychological needs were not being met because of the long separation from their biological parents, which might well account for such negative emotions. Their guardians' lack of awareness of such emotional responses to their parent's absence also led to the child getting angry with their guardians and classmates at the smallest of things, and even to them getting into fights with their peers.

The grandparents' low educational level, under-estimation of the importance of children studying and their connivance with the children wasting time on leisure pursuits determine that they are not able to effectively discipline and support the children's education. They seldom communicated and contacted the child's school teachers and did not understand the importance of the child's performance at school. In their opinion, educating children was the responsibility of school and the teachers. While most of them did think schooling was worthwhile and that children should study hard, they neither knew how to assist the children with their studies nor how to cooperate with the school to improve the child's school performance.

In this research, the left-behind children's school performance was more likely to decline when the child was looked after by their grandparents. This was confirmed by evidence from a variety of different sources. The children's school teachers reported that there were more mistakes appearing in their homework; some left-behind children did not finish their homework or did not do their homework at all. After their parents' migration the children's homework was not checked by their grandparents. Grandparents proved they were simply

not capable of home tuition or helping the child with their studies. Instead of spending time on homework some left-behind children spent much more time on leisure such as hanging around with friends and watching TV. They also lied to their guardians about finishing their homework, but grandparents did not do anything about this. A number of left-behind girls had to share in domestic tasks for their grandparents which meant a decrease in time and attention for their studies.

Parents' Compensation for being Absent

The majority of parents expressed their regret about their absence from their children's daily lives. They adopted a diverse range of methods to show their concern and love for their children. The use of special gifts was the most common way they tried to express their feelings for their children. It served as a means to offer compensation for being left behind and allowed the children to share in their relative prosperity and increase in income following their migration. Sometimes the gift was not only a material thing, but also a symbol of their love and a form of emotional communication.

The gifts they gave were mainly of stationery, books, clothes, toys and food. Books are more likely to be given as gifts by the parents, as symbolic of their expectation and aspirations for their child and as a form of enlightening their children. Some parents developed new ideas about the importance of the child's education and development after they were exposed to life in the city. They would buy things which were rare or unusual in rural areas, such as the electronic piano bought for Jingjing (Chapter 4). To these children, such presents have both practical value and special meaning. When they miss their parents, the gifts serve to alleviate the feelings to some extent. Many of the children showed such gifts to other people, to reveal their parents love for them

and to show the fact they are not forgotten when their parents are away.

However, it is the parents' care which is irreplaceable, no matter the gifts which seek to compensate for this. This was especially so when a special occasion occurred and the parents' companionship in sharing it was missed. The children live in the hope that they will be able to spend more time with their parents in the future. A few parents attempted to employ other, and arguably more effective and active, ways of compensating for their absence. 'Quality time' spent together by parents and child was one such means. Some parents worked on handicrafts with their child, whilst others sought to share experiences with their children through travelling to special places with them (Qiang in Chapter 4). Through such means of communication it was hoped that a special bond was both created and strengthened between parent and child and the warmth of family love was deeply felt by the children.

The Limitations of the Research

The empirical fieldwork for this thesis was based on a small-scale study in one small corner of China and, as such, great care should be taken in making too bold a claim for the external validity of the study. The thesis makes no claims of reaching conclusions about the circumstances and experiences of *all* left-behind children in China, nor of the ways in which *all* parents contemplate care arrangements for their children when they migrate. Circumstances and solutions are likely to vary according to factors such as climate, the distance from the city to the rural hinterland, transport and the ability of parents to commute or travel back home.

The research conducted for this thesis has also relied upon samples of

convenience and a particular array of research methods in gathering data. Were these to have been different it is also possible that this could have influenced the results. The inclusion of children living in various forms of surrogate care was not planned in the sample design, but it did prove important to the overall inductive strategy of this research to include such care arrangements, once they had been discovered. Given the emerging literature on such patterns of care, it is clear that there are very significant variations in the size of surrogate families, the skills and experience of staff and the services being offered. It should be recognised that the conclusions reached from the fieldwork for this thesis may not be generalisable and further research is necessary in order to explore this issue more fully.

Yet, despite the humble claims being made for the empirical findings, the research does provide an important glimpse into some major social issues being faced within China and elsewhere. The concluding sections below comment further on a limited number of such wider issues. These include the implications of this thesis for: the classification system of rural and urban workers; the ways in which a private sector of surrogate care seems to have emerged, because of a lack of state provision; the need to regulate this new sector; and, the threat to inter-generational relationships posed by care for left-behind children. The research has also raised issues about how the various partners in the care of left-behind children may be able to better respond to the challenges they face.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Policy Makers

As indicated previously, left-behind children emerged in the process of urbanisation, in which a large number of surplus rural labourers flowed into urban areas but had to leave their children back in their home villages. Thus, to eliminate the phenomenon of left-behind children, it is vital to break a range of barriers which seem to be based on the Household Registered System, in relation to employment, healthcare, housing and education. In this study, most migrant parents, indeed most migrant workers, are not able to enjoy the same rights as their urban counterparts. Their identity as rural residents disadvantages them in terms of employment, healthcare, housing and their children's education. To remove these constraints, migrant workers should be treated equally with urban residents. Like laid-off urban workers and low-income urban workers, migrant farmers also should enjoy some preferential policies in terms of tax, social welfare and children's schooling, which plays an important role in children migrating with their parents.

To ensure migrant children receive good quality education, a range of regulations and measures need to be instituted and implemented, both in state schools and schools for migrant children. To eradicate the discriminatory treatment of migrant children and the higher fees that state schools charge them, the local government, especially the education department, should intensify their supervision of these schools, and inspect their work regularly. For a considerable time, private schools have been required as the main means of providing education for migrant children. The researcher suggests that the government should enhance state support through a variety of different means. This is required in order to equip and train staff including teachers and

managers, to be competent in offering a higher quality of education for children. Experts should be required to supervise and inspect their work and help them solve any difficulties they face in developing their teaching. Resources should be collected from the entire community to improve the equipment and facilities.

At the same time, the government should exert itself to bridge the gap between rural areas and urban areas which has been widened by the trends discussed in this thesis. This goal could be attained by increasing investment in agriculture, reducing the burden of tax on farmers, and providing wider opportunities for surplus rural labourers to take up an occupation locally. This is important in order to prevent workers from being separated from their children or allowing them to return home more frequently. This should be supplemented by the promotion of reform of the social security system in rural areas. Fully-fledged development in rural areas is fundamental to the whole society, otherwise the removal of the urban-rural dual system might create more social problems, such as depopulation in rural areas and the further population expansion in urban areas.

Regulations and Recommendations of Surrogate Care

Where there is no state provision, the market of surrogate care may expand. Parents with a need for care will purchase such care from teachers or others who have the skills and resources. Previous studies, as well as this research show that professional surrogate parents are more competent than the children's grandparents, and other relatives, in aspects of their well-being. Yet, there are still a number of limitations and problems to be concerned about. Patterns of surrogate care vary in the level of service. The care-providers include a range of different people, including laid-off workers with a good reputation and school teachers. There might be no more than ten or almost a

hundred left-behind children living in a surrogate family. Concerns about quality of care are mainly on the potential abuse of market power by unscrupulous providers. To safeguard and improve their services, regulations and recommendations need to be taken into account by the government departments concerned, schools and parents.

Detailed rules and regulations are essential for the further development of this business and to guarantee the welfare of the service receivers. These should include:

- The care provider's educational level, qualifications, skills etc. should be stipulated.
- Training to be required.
- Both surrogate families and part-time surrogate parents such as school teachers should be registered by the local government. A license is compulsory to start the business.
- The population of children under the service should be under inspection, on the basis of the resources available to the carers.
- The service provider's responsibilities need to be clarified and an agreement made between them and the parents.
- The services provided and the fees charged should be standardised and subject to inspection.

This research shows that there is a tension between the school teachers' caring role as surrogate parents and their teaching role as full-time school teachers. As good-quality care for left-behind children is in great demand, the teachers' part-time job as service providers should not simply be banned by schools.

Compared with grandparents, parents and the children know less about the

professional surrogate parents. Therefore a deep understanding of the system and service is crucial before the parents make up their mind. After that they should help their children to quickly adjust to the new family and new parents.

It is vitally important for professional surrogate parents to observe the rules, regulations and agreement with the parents. To enhance the quality of their service, cooperation with the government, schools and other organisations is required. Furthermore, they should pay more attention to the children's emotional development, which is more likely to be overlooked by both parents and school teachers.

Impact on the Older Generation and the Relationship between Generations

The emergence of the phenomenon of the left-behind child has not only created a great impact on the children but also on their guardians. Grandparents who take care of them are very likely to suffer, both physically and psychologically, from the pressure of looking after grandchildren. It seems that by leaving the children with their grandparents, migrant parents could save money on caring expenses and have less worry about the children being in a settled and secure environment, and most grandparents and grandchildren seem initially happy with this arrangement. However, it eventually brings economic pressures, physical burdens and psychological stress for grandparents, when it continues over a long period of time.

In rural China, a full-fledged social security system is far from well established, so rural residents have to depend on their sons when they get old. At first sight, it might be thought that the labour force migration might contribute to enhancing the ability of the parents' generation to be able to support the

grandparents in their old age. Yet, this is far from straightforward. This research indicates that the migration of the parents has increased the burdens on the grandparents and has lowered their overall quality of life. The left-behind children's grandparents have to look after themselves, work on the land without the help of their son *and* take care of their grandchildren, if both of the parents are absent, as we have seen some of them have to look after more than one grandchild.

In this study, the majority of grandparents living with their left-behind grandchildren are not very healthy. Many of them have to do all the farm work, which previously was shared with their children before they went to the city. Once they have left, most of the migrant parents only provided their children's living expenses and tuition fees. Furthermore, most of the older generation did not benefit from the increases of their children's income. Indeed many used their own money to satisfy their grandchildren's needs (and whims). Therefore their financial situation was not improved but worsened. At the same time their concern for their grandchildren's safety, health and school performance also placed tremendous emotional pressure on them. If their own children showed disapproval about the way in which they were fulfilling their guardianship, this also had an adverse impact on their relationship. The left-behind children's parents may be dissatisfied with the older generation's ignorance, antiquated ideas and dotage upon the children, but when expressed, this sentiment is deeply hurtful to grandparents. Furthermore, many grandparents had reasons of their own to complain about their own children who chose to migrate to the cities. Seniors complained about their children's irresponsibility and lack of consideration. Some of them attempted to raise their concerns with their children. On occasions this led to alternative arrangements being made for the care of the children away from grandparents, something which served to intensify the conflict between generations.

All this suggests that the fragile bonds of dependency between the generations in rural China may be under threat, as a result of conflicts between different ways of thinking (about caring for children and providing for the aged), clashes between expectations (of the enhancement of their children's well-being for the parents and more support and understanding for the seniors) and the reality (a drop in children's well-being and less provision and consideration for the grandparents). This leads to less possibility of and less efficient cooperation between children's parents and grandparents to improve their welfare. Without sufficient support and reward, the grandparents' caring ability and enthusiasm would be weakened, and the parents might fail to understand the actual situation of their children and respond to any problem which emerged in time. Thus, it must be recommended that parents need to evaluate the seniors' health, work burden, ability and skills of caring for children, before they leave their children with them. Since they made the migration, they should show concern for the grandparents' generation, and provide them with material rewards, emotional encouragement and intellectual support.

Furthermore, the parents' absence does not mean the absence of their responsibilities to their children. Parents need to try and use all ways to contact and communicate with their children: telephone; post; and, the internet, should be used as much as they can to get information about their children's daily life, education, social relationships and emotional development. They should also communicate and cooperate with other people who are also concerned, in order to mitigate the adverse impacts on the children. However, this study suggests that face-to-face interaction is the best way for parents and children to understand and communicate with each other. Family reunions are highly necessary for both children and their grandparents. Parents should return home or invite their children to the city at least once a year. The aged guardians' stress and burden might also be reduced to some extent by this.

Response from Schools

The research in this thesis serves to illustrate the strong contrasts in children's experience of schooling. Most reported being academically disadvantaged, whilst a few were successful in the system. Some of them seemed to spend more time with their school friends but others tended to retreat from their previous circles. The schools have not developed a system for dealing with left-behind children, with multiple disadvantages, to safeguard their well-being. Whilst a large portion of left-behind children matched the stereotype of "problem pupil", many of their problems were overlooked from the very beginning. In some cases it was because children were not willing to confide in others about their difficulties, and teachers were unable, or unwilling to investigate them. In other cases it was because schools were unable to deal with the complexities of the children's needs, their limited knowledge of the children, and limited resources to meet such needs.

It was evidenced in this research that in some schools teachers living with left-behind children helped to tackle some of these issues. School teachers providing daily care is not strongly recommended for the tension between the school teachers' caring role as surrogate parents and their teaching role as full-time school teachers, but calling on teachers to give extra concern and support to these children is important.

The school should keep updating the left-behind children's student portfolios including when and where their parents work, and their contact details; their guardians' situation and contact details; their school performance over time; their social relationships and psychological status; and different teachers' comments about them. Accordingly, there should be staff taking responsibility for communicating and contact with their parents and guardians. Schools

should attempt to reach out to these guardians and parents and to help them reach a broader view of education through exchanging information about aspects of schooling and the children's potential problems. Schools would then obtain more information about students and consequently be able to make a better coping plan; conversely, parents and guardians could also act according to the feedback from the school to support the children and help them to improve their well-being in the family. The school teachers also need to communicate with the left-behind children regularly to understand their daily experience, their difficulties and their needs.

Appendix 1:

Children took part in the semi-structured interview by gender, age and school performance in Stage one (April-June 2008)

Left-behind Children

Cared for by grandparents: 3 female, 3 male=6 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Cheng	M	11	Average
Jun	M	10	Average
Jingjing	F	10	Above Average
Lele	F	9	Below Average
Fei	F	11	Average
Guang	M	10	Below Average

Cared for by teachers or other surrogate carers: 2 female, 2 male=4 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Xin	M	10	Below Average
Qiang	M	12	Average
Hong	F	12	Average
Lingling	F	11	Average

Cared for by other people: 1 female, 1 male=2 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Yu	M	11	Below Average
Jie	M	11	Average

Not left-behind Children

Two not-left-behind children with one parent migrated: 1 female, 1 male=2 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Huan	F	10	Above Average
Feng	M	11	Average

Two not-left-behind children living with both parents: 1 female, 1 male=2 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Mei	F	11	Below Average
Tian	M	10	Above Average

Appendix 2:

Children took part in the semi-structured interview by gender, age and school performance in Stage two (January to March 2009)

Left-behind Children

Cared for by grandparents: 3 female, 2 male=5 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Huan	F	11	Above Average
Jun	M	11	Below Average
Jingjing	F	12	Average
Fei✕	F	12	Average
Guang	M	11	Below Average

Cared for by teachers or other surrogate carers: 3 female, 2 male=5 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Xin	M	11	Below Average
Qiang✕	M	13	Average
Hong	F	13	Above Average
Lingling	F	12	Average
Lele✕	F	10	Below Average

Cared for by other people: 2 male=2 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Yu	M	12	Below Average
Jie✕	M	13	Average

Not-left-behind Children

Two not-left-behind children with one parent migrated: 2 male=2 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Cheng	M	12	Below Average
Feng	M	11	Average

Two not-left-behind children living with both parents: 1 female, 1 male=2 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Mei	F	12	Below Average
Tian	M	11	Above Average

※ **Children who were not equipped with scrapbook packages in this stage.**

Appendix 3:

Children took part in the semi-structured interview by gender, age and school performance in Stage three (February 2010)

Left-behind Children

Cared for by grandparents: 3 female, 2 male=5 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Huan	F	12	Above Average
Jun	M	13	Below Average
Jingjing	F	13	Average
Fei	F	13	Average
Guang	M	13	Below Average

Cared for by teachers or other surrogate carers: 3 female, 3 male=6 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Xin	M	12	Average
Qiang	M	14	Average
Hong	F	14	Above Average
Lingling	F	13	Average
Lele	F	11	Below Average
Yu	M	13	Below Average

Cared for by other people: 1male =2 in total

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Jie	M	14	Below Average

Not-left-behind Children

One not-left-behind child care for by her mother

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>School Performance</i>
Cheng	M	13	Average

Appendix 4:

The four main case studies and the dynamics of their guardianships

Name	Before this study	Stage one	Stage two	Stage three
Cheng	Used to lived with maternal grandparents	Living with paternal grandparents	Living with mother	Living with mother
Xin	Used to lived with paternal grandmother	Living in surrogate family	Living in surrogate family	Living in surrogate family
Yu	Living with uncle	Living with uncle	Living with uncle	Living in surrogate family
Huan	Living with mother	Living with mother	Living with paternal grandparents	Living with paternal grandparents

Appendix 5:

Questionnaire/Structured interview

Ask all

1 Sex

☐ Male ☐ Female

2 Age

- ☐ <7
☐ 7-9
☐ 10-12
☐ 13-15
☐ >15

3 The number of people in your household

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ >4

4 Do you have any sisters or brothers?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No (if No go to Q 6)

5 How old are they? And gender

- | A____ | B____ | C____ | D____ | E____ |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <7 | <input type="checkbox"/> <7 | <input type="checkbox"/> <7 | <input type="checkbox"/> <7 | <input type="checkbox"/> <7 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7-9 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7-9 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7-9 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7-9 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7-9 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10-12 | <input type="checkbox"/> 10-12 | <input type="checkbox"/> 10-12 | <input type="checkbox"/> 10-12 | <input type="checkbox"/> 10-12 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 13-15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 13-15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 13-15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 13-15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 13-15 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> >15 | <input type="checkbox"/> >15 | <input type="checkbox"/> >15 | <input type="checkbox"/> >15 | <input type="checkbox"/> >15 |

6 Who are working away?

- ☐ Both parents (go to Section 1)
☐ Father only (mother at home) (go to Section 2)
☐ Mother only (father at home) (go to Section 2)
☐ Neither (go to Section 3)

※ questions will be answered by all the children while the categories are changed slightly

Section 1 for the left-behind children (parents working away)

※7 Which of the things on this box best describes what your father doing in the recent year?

- ☐ Full-time paid employee (30 or more hours a week)
- ☐ Part-time paid employee (under 30 hours a week)
- ☐ Full-time self-employed
- ☐ Part-time self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed and seeking work
- ☐ Temporarily sick/disabled
- ☐ Permanently sick/disabled
- ☐ Looking after home/family
- ☐ Wholly retired
- ☐ Other(specify)_____
- ☐ Do not know

※8 Which of the things on this box best describes what your mother doing in the recent year?

- ☐ Full-time paid employee (30 or more hours a week)
- ☐ Part-time paid employee (under 30 hours a week)
- ☐ Full-time self-employed
- ☐ Part-time self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed and seeking work
- ☐ Temporarily sick/disabled
- ☐ Permanently sick/disabled
- ☐ Looking after home/family
- ☐ Wholly retired
- ☐ Other(specify)_____
- ☐ Do not know

9 where are they working?

	Father	Mother
In the town you are living	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other city in the same province	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other provinces	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10 Have you been to the town/village/city where your parents work?

A, Yes (if Yes go to Q 11)

B, No (if No go to Q 12)

11 How long had you been there?

- ☐ Less than 1 week
- ☐ 1 week to 1 month
- ☐ more than 1 month to half a year
- ☐ More half a year to 1 year
- ☐ More 1 year to 3 years
- ☐ More than 3 years

12 How long have your parents working away from the village?

Father Mother

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Less than 6 months | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More than 6 months | | |
| to 1 year | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More than 1-3 years | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More than 3-5 years | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More than 5 years | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

13 Do you try to keep contact with your parents?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No (if No go to Q 19)

14 Do your parents try to keep in contact with you?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No (if No go to Q 19)

15 How do you try to keep in contact with your parents or how do your parents try to keep in contact with you? (In recent years)

- | | From Your parents | From You |
|-----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Emails | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Letters | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Telephone | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Visits | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Others__ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

16 Do you have other methods before?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No (if No go to Q 17)

17 What were the methods?

- | | From Your parents | From You |
|-----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Emails | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Letters | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Telephone | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Visits | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Others__

☐☐

18 How often do your parent(s) contact with you?

- ☐ Less than 3 days
- ☐ More than 3 days to 1 week
- ☐ More than 1 week to 2 weeks
- ☐ More than 2 weeks to 1 month
- ☐ More than 1 month
- ☐ Others

19 When did you last see your parent(s) who work away?

- ☐ Within the past month
- ☐ More than one week to one month ago
- ☐ More than one month to three months ago
- ☐ More than three months to 6 months ago
- ☐ More than 6 months to 1 years ago
- ☐ More than 1 year ago
- ☐ Others

20 Who are you living with now?

- ☐ Grandparents
- ☐ Uncles or aunts
- ☐ Old brothers or sisters,
- ☐ Live alone
- ☐ Students' accommodations
- ☐ Others__

21 Have you ever lived with someone other than the people you are living with now?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (if No go to Q 23)

22 When your parents are working away with whom have you been living over the past 2 years (more than one boxes can be ticked)

- ☐ Grandparents
- ☐ Uncles or aunts
- ☐ Old brothers or sisters,
- ☐ Live alone
- ☐ Students' accommodations
- ☐ Others__

23 What is the age of your guardians?

A _____	B _____	C _____	D _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 20	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 20	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 20	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 20
<input type="checkbox"/> 20-30	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-30	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-30	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-30
<input type="checkbox"/> 31-40	<input type="checkbox"/> 31-40	<input type="checkbox"/> 31-40	<input type="checkbox"/> 31-40
<input type="checkbox"/> 41-50	<input type="checkbox"/> 41-50	<input type="checkbox"/> 41-50	<input type="checkbox"/> 41-50
<input type="checkbox"/> 51-60	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-60	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-60	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-60
<input type="checkbox"/> More than 60	<input type="checkbox"/> More than 60	<input type="checkbox"/> More than 60	<input type="checkbox"/> More than 60

※24 What do you do normally after school? (more than one boxes can be ticked)

- A ☐ Do my homework
 B ☐ Do some reading
 C ☐ Play with some friends
 D ☐ Watch TV
 E ☐ Go to the internet bar
 F ☐ Do some housework (if F go to Q 24. Q25)
 G ☐ Others_____

※25 What kind of house work do you do? (more than one boxes can be ticked)

- ☐ Wash clothes
☐ Wash dishes
☐ Go shopping
☐ Cook meals
☐ Looking after domestic animals
☐ Attend the ill
☐ Hew
☐ Plough
☐ Weed
☐ Others_____

26 How does the amount of housework you do now compare with before when your parent(s) were at home?

- ☐ Keep the same
☐ Decreased
☐ Increased a little
☐ Increased a lot

※27 Do you have any pocket money?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No (if No go to Q31)

※28 How much is your pocket every week?

- ☐ Less than 1 Yuan
- ☐ 1 to 4Yuan
- ☐ More than 4 to 10 Yuan
- ☐ More than 10 Yuan

※29 What do you spend it on? (more than one boxes can be ticked)

- ☐ Books
- ☐ Clothing
- ☐ Stationery
- ☐ Toys
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Others(specify)_____

30 How does the amount of pocket money you get now compare with what you received before your parent(s) worked away?

- ☐ Keep the same
- ☐ Decreased
- ☐ Increased a little
- ☐ Increased a lot

31 Who do/did you turn to if you get some trouble now and is this different to before your parents work away?

	Now	Before
Myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The people living with me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neighbors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others(specify)___	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

※32 How do you think of your school performance in tests?

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Just so so
- ☐ Very poor

33 Did your school performance change after your parents away to work?

- ☐ worse than before
- ☐ No different
- ☐ Better than before
- ☐ Do not know

34 Have you ever experienced problems in completing your homework?

- ☐ YES (if YES go to Q 35) ☐ NO

※35 What do you do when you get some difficulties about your homework?

- ☐ Turn to the teacher
☐ Turn to classmates
☐ Turn to the guardians
☐ Try to solve things on myself
☐ Others__

※36 How do you arrange your study?

- ☐ Only study at school
☐ Study at school and always do homework at home only
☐ Study more at home not just do homework
☐ Others__

※37 Have you sometimes not done well in a test?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No, I have always done well (if No go to Q 39)

※38 If you did not do well in a test what do you think might be the reason?

- ☐ my fault
☐ too much other work to do
☐ less help and supervision from guardians
☐ Another reasons(please state)_____

39 What's your parents' attitude to your school performance when they were at home?

- ☐ They do not care about it at all
☐ Only care about the marks of the examination
☐ Concern about my school performance but never contact with the teachers
☐ Concern about my school performance and often contact with the teachers
☐ Do not know

※40 What's your guardians' attitude to your school performance now?

- ☐ They do not care about it at all
☐ Only care about the marks of the examination
☐ Concern about my school performance but never contact with the teachers
☐ Concern about my school performance and often contact with the teachers
☐ Do not know

※41 After school what kind of activities do you take part in?

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Interests groups (reading, drawing, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Competitions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contributions to the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

※42 Do you have many close friends at school?

- ☐ Yes, more than 3
- ☐ 3 or less
- ☐ Nobody

43 Did your classmates' attitude to you change after your parents left?

- ☐ No change at all
- ☐ Yes, friendlier to me
- ☐ Most of them are ok but some are not friendly
- ☐ They often gain extra advantage unfairly from me
- ☐ They often bully me

※44 What's your guardians and your parents attitude to your meeting up with friends after school?

	Father	Mother	Your guardians
Always allow it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometimes allow it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never allow it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

※45 Which are the statements are really true to you?

- On the whole I am satisfied with myself ☐
- At times I think I am no good at all ☐
- I think that I have a number of good qualities ☐
- I am able to do things as well as most other people ☐
- I feel I do not have much to be proud of ☐
- I certainly feel useless at times ☐
- I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others ☐
- I wish I could have more respect for myself ☐
- All in all, I a, inclined to feel that I am a failure ☐
- I take a positive attitude towards myself ☐

※46 Who do you think has helps you most (now)?

- ☐ My father
- ☐ My mother
- ☐ My guardians
- ☐ My teachers
- ☐ My friends
- ☐ Other____

47 Thinking back to before you parent(s) worked away who helped most?

- ☐ My father
- ☐ My mother
- ☐ My teachers
- ☐ My friends
- ☐ Other____

Section 2 for the children who have one parent working away

48 Which of the things on this box best describes what your father doing in the recent year?

- ☐ Full-time paid employee (30 or more hours a week)
- ☐ Part-time paid employee (under 30 hours a week)
- ☐ Full-time self-employed
- ☐ Part-time self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed and seeking work
- ☐ Temporarily sick/disabled
- ☐ Permanently sick/disabled
- ☐ Looking after home/family
- ☐ Wholly retired
- ☐ Other(specify)____
- ☐ Do not know

49 Which of the things on this box best describes what your mother doing in the recent year?

- ☐ Full-time paid employee (30 or more hours a week)
- ☐ Part-time paid employee (under 30 hours a week)
- ☐ Full-time self-employed
- ☐ Part-time self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed and seeking work
- ☐ Temporarily sick/disabled
- ☐ Permanently sick/disabled
- ☐ Looking after home/family
- ☐ Wholly retired
- ☐ Other(specify)____
- ☐ Do not know

50 Where is he/she working?

	Father	or	Mother
In the town you are living	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Other city in the same province	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Other provinces	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Others_____	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not know	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

51 Have you been to the place your father/mother working at?

A, Yes (if Yes go to Q 52) B, No (if No go to Q 53)

52 How long had you been there?

- ☐ Less than 1 week
- ☐ 1 week to 1 month
- ☐ more than 1 month to half a year
- ☐ More half a year to 1 year
- ☐ More 1 year to 3 years
- ☐ More than 3 years
- ☐ Others

53 How long have your parents working away from the village?

Father or Mother

Less than 1 year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than 1-3 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than 3-5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

54 Do you try to keep contact with your father or mother?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No (if No go to Q 59)

55 Do your parents try to keep in contact with you?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No (if No go to Q 59)

56 How do you try to keep in contact with your father/mother or how do your father/mother try to keep in contact with you? (In recent years)

	From Your father/mother	From You
Emails	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Visits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others__	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

57 Do you have other methods before?

☐ Yes ☐ No (if No go to Q 58)

58 What were the methods?

	From Your father/mother	From You
Emails	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others__	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

59 How often do your father/mother contact with you?

- ☐ Less than 3 days
- ☐ More than 3 days to 1 week
- ☐ More than 1 week to 2 weeks
- ☐ More than 2 weeks to 1 month
- ☐ More than 1 month

60 When did you last see your parent(s) who work away?

- ☐ Within the past month
- ☐ More than one week to one month ago
- ☐ More than one month to three months ago
- ☐ More than three months to 6 months ago
- ☐ More than 6 months to 1 years ago
- ☐ More than 1 year ago

61 What do you do normally after school?

- A ☐ Do my homework
- B ☐ Do some reading
- C ☐ Play with some friends
- D ☐ Watch TV
- E ☐ Go to the internet bar
- F ☐ Do some housework (if F go to Q 62. Q63)
- G ☐ Others__

62 What kind of house work do you do?

- ☐ Wash clothes
- ☐ Wash dishes
- ☐ Go shopping
- ☐ Cook meals
- ☐ Look after domestic animals
- ☐ Attend the ill
- G ☐ Hew
- H ☐ Plough
- I ☐ Weed
- G ☐ Others(please state)____

63 How does the amount of housework you do now compare with before when your father/mother was at home?

- ☐ Keep the same
- ☐ Decreased
- ☐ Increased a little
- ☐ Increased a lot

64 Do you have any pocket money?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (if No go to Q25)

65 How much is your pocket every week?

- ☐ Less than 1 Yuan
- ☐ 1 to 4 Yuan
- ☐ More than 4 to 10 Yuan
- ☐ More than 10 Yuan

66 What do you spend it on? (more than one boxes could be ticked)

- ☐ Books
- ☐ Clothing
- ☐ Stationery
- ☐ Toys
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Others(specify)_____

67 How does the amount of pocket money you get now compare with what you received before your father/mother worked away?

- ☐ Keep the same
- ☐ Decreased
- ☐ Increased a little
- ☐ Increased a lot

68 Who do/did you turn to if you get some trouble now and before your father/mother work away?

Now

Before

- ☐ Myself
- ☐ My father
- ☐ My mother
- ☐ My teachers
- ☐ My friends
- ☐ Other relatives
- ☐ Neighbors
- ☐ Others(specify)___

69 How do you think of your school performance in tests?

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ average
- ☐ Very poor

70 Did your school performance change after your father/mother away to work?

- ☐ No better than before
- ☐ No different
- ☐ Better than before
- ☐ Do not know

71 Have you ever experienced problems in completing your studies?

- ☐ No (if No go to Q 30)
- ☐ Yes

72 What do you do when you get some difficulties about your studies?

- ☐ Turn to the teacher
- ☐ Turn to classmates
- ☐ Turn to my mother
- ☐ Turn to my father
- ☐ Try to solve things on myself
- ☐ Others___

73 How do you arrange your study?

- ☐ Only study at school
- ☐ Study at school and always do homework at home only
- ☐ Study more at home not just do homework
- ☐ Others___

74 Have you sometimes not done well in a test?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (if No go to Q 33)

75 If you did not do well in a test what do you think might be the reason?

- ☐ my fault

- ☐ too much other work to do
- ☐ less help and supervision from guardians
- ☐ Another reasons(please state)_____

76 What's your father/mother's attitude to your school performance when both of them were at home?

- ☐ They do not care about it at all
- ☐ Only care about the marks of the examination
- ☐ Concern about my school performance but never contact with the teachers
- ☐ Concern about my school performance and often contact with the teachers
- ☐ Do not know

77 What's your father/mother's attitude to your school performance now?

	Father	Mother
They do not care about it at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Only care about the marks of the examination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Concern about my school performance but never contact with the teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Concern about my school performance and often contact with the teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

78 After school what kind of activities do you usually take part in?

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Interests groups (reading, drawing, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Competitions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contributions to the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

79 Have you involved in these activities changed since your father/mother staying working away

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, decreased
- ☐ Yes, increased

80 Do you have many good friends at school?

- ☐ Yes, more than 3
- ☐ No, only a few
- ☐ Nobody

81 Did your classmates' attitude to you change after your father/mother left?

- ☐ No change at all
- ☐ Yes, friendlier to me

- ☐ Most of them are ok but some are not friendly
- ☐ They often gain extra advantage unfairly from me
- ☐ They often bully me

82 Which of the statements are really true to you?

- On the whole I am satisfied with myself ()
- At times I think I am no good at all ()
- I think that I have a number of good qualities ()
- I am able to do things as well as most other people ()
- I feel I do not have much to be proud of ()
- I certainly feel useless at times ()
- I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others ()
- I wish I could have more respect for myself ()
- All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure ()
- I take a positive attitude towards myself ()

83 Who do you think has helped you most in recent years and in the past before your father/mother work away?

	In recent years	In the past
My father	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My mother	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 3 to the children with both parents at home

84 Which of the things on this box best describes what your father doing in the recent year?

- ☐ Full-time paid employee (30 or more hours a week)
- ☐ Part-time paid employee (under 30 hours a week)
- ☐ Full-time self-employed
- ☐ Part-time self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed and seeking work
- ☐ Temporarily sick/disabled
- ☐ Permanently sick/disabled
- ☐ Looking after home/family
- ☐ Wholly retired
- ☐ Other(specify)_____
- ☐ Do not know

85 Which of the things on this box best describes what your mother doing in the recent year?

- ☐ Full-time paid employee (30 or more hours a week)
- ☐ Part-time paid employee (under 30 hours a week)
- ☐ Full-time self-employed
- ☐ Part-time self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed and seeking work
- ☐ Temporarily sick/disabled
- ☐ Permanently sick/disabled
- ☐ Looking after home/family
- ☐ Wholly retired
- ☐ Other(specify)_____
- ☐ Do not know

86 What do you usually do after school?

- A ☐ Do my homework
- B ☐ Do some reading
- C ☐ Play with some friends
- D ☐ Watch TV
- E ☐ Go to the internet bar
- F ☐ Do some housework (if F go to Q 87)
- G ☐ Others_____

87 What kind of house work do you do? (more than one boxes could be ticked)

- ☐ Wash clothes
- ☐ Wash dishes
- ☐ Go shopping
- ☐ Cook meals
- ☐ look after domestic animals
- ☐ Attend the ill
- ☐ Hew
- ☐ Plough
- ☐ Weed
- ☐ Others

88 Do you have any pocket money?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (if No go to Q 91)

89 How much is your pocket every week?

- ☐ Less than 1 Yuan
- ☐ 1 to 4 Yuan
- ☐ More than 4 to 10 Yuan
- ☐ More than 10 Yuan

90 What do you spend it on?

- ☐ Books
- ☐ Clothing
- ☐ Stationery
- ☐ Toys
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Others(specify)_____

91 Who do you turn to if you get some trouble?

- ☐ Myself
- ☐ My father
- ☐ My mother
- ☐ My teachers
- ☐ My friends
- ☐ Other relatives
- ☐ Neighbors
- ☐ Others(specify)____

92 How do you think of your school performance in tests?

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ average
- ☐ Very poor

93 Have you ever experienced problems in completing your studies?

- ☐ No (if No go to Q 95)
- ☐ Yes (if Yes go to Q 94)

94 What do you do when you get some difficulties about your studies?

- ☐ Turn to the teacher
- ☐ Turn to classmates
- ☐ Turn to my father
- ☐ Turn to my mother
- ☐ Try to solve things on myself
- ☐ Others____

95 How do you arrange your study?

- ☐ Only study at school
- ☐ Study at school and do homework at home
- ☐ Study more at home
- ☐ Others____

96 Have you sometimes not done well in a test?

- ☐ Yes (if Yes go to Q 36)
- ☐ No (if No go to Q 37)

97 If you did not do well in a test what do you think might be the reason?

- ☐ my fault
- ☐ too much other work to do
- ☐ less help and supervision from parents
- ☐ Another reasons(please state)_____

98 What's your parents' attitude to your school performance before they work away?

- ☐ They do not care about it at all
- ☐ Only care about the marks of the examination
- ☐ Concern about my school performance and often contact with the teachers
- ☐ Concern about my school performance but never contact with the teachers
- ☐ Do not know

99 After school what kind of activities do you take part in?

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Interests groups (reading, drawing, etc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Competitions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contributions to the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

100 Do you have many good friends at school?

- ☐ Yes, more than 3
- ☐ No, only a few
- ☐ Nobody

101 What's your father's attitude to your meeting up with friends after school?

- ☐ Always allow it
- ☐ Sometimes allow it
- ☐ Never allow it

102 What's your mother's attitude to your meeting up with friends after school?

- ☐ Always allow it
- ☐ Sometimes allow it
- ☐ Never allow it

103 Which are the statements are really true to you?

- On the whole I am satisfied with myself ☐
- At times I think I am no good at all ☐
- I think that I have a number of good qualities ☐
- I am able to do things as well as most other people ☐
- I feel I do not have much to be proud of ☐
- I certainly feel useless at times ☐
- I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others ☐
- I wish I could have more respect for myself ☐
- All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure ☐
- I take a positive attitude towards myself ☐

104 Who do you think has helped you most in recent years?

My parents
My teachers
My friends
Other_____

Appendix 6:

Interview Schedule for Children April-June 2008

1. What do you like most and dislike most about?

- (1) Life in the village
- (2) Going to school
- (3) Your friends
- (4) Your family
- (5) Time of the year

2 Could you tell me the happiest time you have been through?

- (1) When
- (2) Where
- (3) Who got involved?
- (4) How did that happen?
- (5) The impact on you and other people
- (6) The opinion of other people
- (7) Did you tell others about your feeling?
- (8) What did they say and what did they do?
- (9) Did you try to make that happen again?
- (10) If you did not, why not? Any consideration?
- (11) If you did, what the results? Why?
- (12) Your opinion of the results and others' opinion

3 Could you tell me the worst time you have been through?

- (1) When
- (2) Where
- (3) Who got involved?

- (4) How did that happen?
- (5) The impact on you and other people
- (6) The opinion of other people
- (7) Did you tell others about your feeling?
- (8) What did they say and what did they do?
- (9) Did that happen again?
- (10) Did you try to avoid that kind of thing?
- (11) What were the results?

4 About your expectation

- (1) What is your expectation or what do you want to do in the future?
- (2) When did you have this expectation?
- (3) Why do you have this expectation?
- (4) Does anyone know your expectation?
- (5) If not why do not you tell them?
- (6) If yes, who know your expectation? What did they say?
- (7) If your parents know that have they done something to help you?
- (8) Have you done something to realize your expectation?
- (9) How are they going on?

Appendix 7:

Interview Schedule for Guardians April-June 2008

1 How long have the child's parents being away?

2 Has the child been staying with you since his/her parents' absence?

If not, who were the child's guardians and why does the child stay with you now?

3 Did the child change after his/her parents' migration? If yes, how?

4 Did you talk about the changes with the child/parents?

5 How well did you know the child before s/he came to live with them?

6 What kinds of things do you do together/talk about?

7 What does a typical day look like?

8 How do you handle conflict?

9 How do you manage when the child is ill?

10 What do you enjoy/find stressful in looking after the child?

11 What do you think the role of a guardian is?

12 What is your expectation for the child and his/her parents?

13 What help have you had from other people, and who?]

14 What do you think is helpful if the school and the government can do something to the child and your family?

Appendix 8:

Interview Schedule for Teachers April-June 2008

1 How long do you teach him/her?

2 How is his/her school performances/ behavior/ relationship with others now?

3 Did you notice anything change after his or her parents' absence? If yes, can you say some details?

4 Did you ever contact with his/her parents/guardians? If yes, what did you talk about? If not, why?

5 Is there anything different between left-behind children and not-left-behind children? If yes, can you point out the differences?

Appendix 9:

Interview Schedule for Neighbors, shopkeeper, etc

April-June 2008

1 More generally, how do you see the differences between left-behind children and not-left-behind children? Can you tell me more about it?

2 Could you tell me about a recent experience with a left-behind child?

3 How typical was that in your view?

4 Any other particular experiences that stand out in your mind?

5 What do you think should be done about that?

Appendix 10:

Scrapbooks Interview Schedule and Back-up Interview Schedule for Children Jan-March 2009

For Left-behind Children

According to the scrapbooks and photos, could you tell me something about your life before your parents went to the city, in last half year and this winter holiday? What is your expectation in a year?

For not-left-behind Children

According to the scrapbooks and photos, could you tell me something about your life in the last half year and this winter holiday? What is your expectation in a year?

Back-up Interview Schedule

1 Could you tell me something about your life before your parents went to the city, in the last half year and this winter holiday?

2 How do you imagine... in half a year?

- (1) Your self
- (2) Your family
- (3) Your education
- (4) Your friends
- (5) Your community

3 What do you want to say to your parents most about your expectation?

Extra questions to left-behind children

4 Did you contact with your parents in the last half year?

If yes,

(1) How often

(2) What did you talk about usually?

(3) How did you feel before and after?

Appendix 11:

Interview Schedule for Guardians Jan-March 2009

1 What does a typical day look like now?

2 Anything happened to the child in the last half year? When, how, who got involved, you and others' responses and feelings, the impacts on the child

3 How do you feel about your caring role?

4 What is your expectation for the child and the parents

5 How do you image you and the child's life in half a year?

Appendix 12:

Interview Schedule for Parents Jan-March 2009

1 How would you describe the child and your relationship with them before you went away?

2 Do you notice anything change to your child after you worked away? If yes, can you tell more details? How did you respond to the changes

3 How decided on this arrangement or how feel about it?

4 Do you think about taking the child with you? Can you tell me the reasons?

5 How was it for you leaving the child behind?

6 What benefits did you see/what risks?

7 Can you imagine your child's life in six month ? If yes, how is it?

8 what do you most want to do for your child to do yourself and to have happen?

9 What do you think is helpful if the school teacher and the government can do for your children.

Appendix 13:

Interview Schedule for Teachers Jan-March 2009

1 How is his/her school performances/ behaviour/ relationship with others now?

2 Anything happened in the last half year? When, how, who got involved, you and others' opinion, the impacts on the child

3 Did you contact with the parents in the last half year? If yes, who started and why?

4 What challenges did left-behind children present for schools/teachers in your view?

5 How do you see the schools' role with them?

6 What can/should you be doing? Any e.g.s of good practice?]

Appendix 14:

Interview Schedule for the Left-behind Children February 2010

1 Can you tell me about the last year? Anything special stand out in your mind?

2 What are your thoughts and feelings?

3 How did other people respond to it?

4 How do you imagine... in half a year?

(1) Your self

(2) Your family

(3) Your education

(4) Your friends

(5) Your community

Appendix 15:

Interview Schedule for the Guardians, the Parents and the Teachers February 2010

1 Can you tell me about the child in the last year? Anything special stand out in your mind?

2 What are your thoughts and feelings?

3 How did other people respond to it?

4 How do you imagine the children in half a year?

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